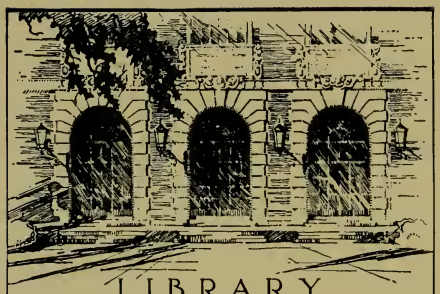

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# MAX WENTWORTH.

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"Les hommes sont la cause que les femmes ne s'aiment pas."—*La Bruyère.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# MAX WENTWORTH.

## CHAPTER I.

"Give me but half an hour's conference with the coldest she in creation, and if I bring her not into a fool's paradise, I'll draw out my tongue, and hang it at her door for a drawlatch."

THE MERCHANT'S WEDDING.

ON this day, the first of the new year, Sir Arthur had invited as many of his numerous friends as could be persuaded to leave their family circle for the more extended one at Wentworth Court. His liberality had rendered the season one of joy and gratitude to his de-

pendants; and he was desirous that it should be attended with equal gratification to the guests whom he had collected beneath his roof. Thus every day was distinguished by some plan to vary their amusements, circumscribed as they generally were by the severity of the weather; and whilst he little dreamed of the changes that were taking place in the feelings of many of those around him, and of the emotions which, where they existed, were concealed under the mask of cheerfulness, he found ready coadjutors in his young relatives in his schemes for the general entertainment of his guests, and the banishment of *ennui* from his blazing hearth.

The whole of the company were assembled, and passing, as best they might, the interval before the summons to the dining-room, when Miss Compton, who would formerly have scorned to allow any one to suppose her detained by her toilette, entered the apartment, with a smile upon her beautifully-chiselled mouth, and a blush

upon her cheek; which caused her to appear as little as possible inclined to the long and awful inflictions of sullenness of which her amiable sister had accused her.

"How very well Alice looks to-day!" remarked Lady Latimer to her sister-in-law. "It must be those beautiful flowers. I do not think I ever saw her with anything in her hair before."

"You have been liberal as usual, Miss Wentworth," said Mrs. Lambert. "There are few who can boast of possessing any such rarities at Christmas, in the midst of so severe a winter; and still fewer, I am sure, who would be generous enough to give them away."

"Indeed, I must disclaim the merit you bestow on me, Mrs. Lambert," replied Melicent. "Our conservatory cannot boast of anything half so beautiful; and, had they been mine, I am afraid I should have been too selfish to think of gathering them."

"Oh no!" said Mrs. Tresham. "I rather suppose those must be the flowers that Tresham took so much pains to procure from Chellingham Castle. He has such good taste in these things, has he not, Kenneth? How very becoming they are to Miss Compton's complexion!"

One or two among her auditors looked a little surprised at the coolness with which Tresham's pretty wife regarded his attentions to the beautiful Alice; and Melicent especially felt grieved at this confirmation of the fears she had for the last day or two entertained, that Mrs. Tresham was relapsing into her former languid indifference; and her husband growing weary of the worthier character which, in her opinion, so well became him.

"We are all envying you that exquisite *guirlande*, Miss Compton," observed Mrs. Mortimer to Alice, who now approached them. "Delightful as flowers always are, their present

scarcity imparts to them a double charm; and it is impossible to refrain from jealousy of your superior good fortune in being the wearer of anything so unattainable."

"I am indeed disposed to be covetous of my flowers," said Alice, not aware that others besides Tresham and herself were acquainted with the donor of what she considered so precious. "They might possibly, as you say, Mrs. Mortimer, have bloomed unheeded among the innumerable decorations of summer; but a charm truly attaches to them, and they become invaluable when appearing, like mine, the sole bright blossoms of the darkened winter."

The look and whisper which seemed to express Mr. Tresham's gratitude for Alice's due appreciation of his gift, were not remarked by those around, any more than the blushing and laughing reply which she returned in the same low tone. As if not disposed to allow of farther interesting communications of a similar kind,

Colonel Lindesay left Mrs. Tresham and Miss Wentworth to offer his escort to the dining-room to his betrothed; who found herself compelled to allow him that position by her side which he was assuredly authorised in claiming. The colloquial powers which Tresham had been able to elicit, however, wholly deserted Alice when he was replaced by her future lord, who vainly endeavoured to chase the cloud from her brow, or to win from her the attention which so willingly repaid the exertions of Tresham for her entertainment. Colonel Lindesay might not be equally fortunate in his selection of topics for conversation; and his manner towards his stately mistress was undoubtedly not tinctured by the careless gallantry which in Tresham had seemed to suit her taste so well. After various attempts which he had made to amuse and interest her had been received with silence and indifference, Lindesay desisted from his efforts; and, leaving Miss Compton to her own contemplations,

turned his attention upon the more general discourse carried on by Sir Arthur and some of his guests.

"You are quite right, Sir Frederick," said their host, speaking with considerable earnestness, "in supposing Yatton Manor to be a place of much greater antiquity than Wentworth Court. It was built by one of my ancestors in the time of King Stephen, and was long the residence of our family, until, in the reign of Elizabeth, the old feudal fortress was considered unsuited for the abode of the more polished courtier of her day; and this mansion was erected by Sir Maximilian Wentworth, whose travels in foreign countries had led him to despise the antiquated and incommodious dwelling which has now been converted into a farm-house."

"Very few English houses of that date remain in equally good preservation," observed Dr. Lambert. "It is now some years since I

was at the Manor; but, before you left England, Maximilian, I remember your going over the old place more than once with me, and listening with commendable patience to the dissertations drawn forth by its remote style of architecture and curious relics."

"Is the ancient mansion, of which I hear so interesting a description, very far distant hence, Mr. Wentworth?" inquired Colonel Lindesay. "I shall certainly endeavour to explore my way thither."

"It is not beyond a ride, and I shall be happy, whenever you please, to act as your guide to Sir Max's venerable dwelling. We may perhaps enlist others to be of our party. Melicent, you would be enchanted with the old Manor, and find yourself amply repaid for the exertion required to reach it, by the beauty of the old building and its picturesque site; especially if you were to view it, as I once remember it, with the snow-wreaths clinging to the ever-

greens mantling the walls, and long fringes of icicles hanging amidst the ivy and around the pointed stonework of the casements."

"No, no, it is too far, Max, at this season. In the long summer days it might have been all very well, but now the expedition would be madness," said Sir Arthur.

"Indeed you must not say so!" exclaimed Melicent. "My cousin has raised still higher the curiosity you had already excited; and the attractions of an old Manor House of King Stephen's time may surely, even at this season, counterbalance those of a warm fire-side."

"Even that I can promise you at the end of your ride," said Mr. Wentworth. "A good comfortable old dame to wait upon you, and a bright fire, I will answer for, unless a wonderful alteration have taken place at the Manor Farm."

The wish for the expedition entertained by

the younger and more adventurous spirits of the party, seemed still farther increased by this assurance; and it was finally arranged that on the first fine day their ride should extend over the somewhat barren country, which intervened in that direction, to the ancient Manor House, which the accounts they received from all acquainted with the spot, induced them to believe well worthy of inspection.

In Walsingham's mind, meanwhile, the unreasonable sentiment created by the unexpected firmness of Isabel during their morning interview, continued unabated. Silent and gloomy, he resolutely refrained from approaching her, although his approbation and gratitude might well have been claimed by her gentle but firm refusal of the assiduities which Lord Lymington persisted in tendering from the moment of his remarking her desertion by her irritable lover;

and for her power to escape from which, not only during dinner, but also in the evening, she was indebted to the ready assistance afforded by her cousin immediately on his perception of her embarrassment. Convinced at length of her unwillingness to favour his laudable design of annoying Walsingham, Lymington reluctantly retreated; whilst Maximilian continued beside her, anxious to alleviate, if possible, her obviously uncomfortable sensations, and to render the sullen avoidance of her lover less conspicuous to others. It was indeed a relief to Isabel to be with one who, needing no explanation of their origin, yet evinced by every look and word, his sympathy with her feelings; and who, ever at hand in the moment of difficulty, had more than once already aided her in the unpleasant task of mitigating the jealousy which it seemed impossible wholly to subdue.

"I have succeeded to-night," said Mrs. Mor-

timer to Walsingham, after she had been gazing for some time with a very sentimental air at Maximilian and Isabel, "in solving an enigma which has lately occasioned me some perplexity. Certainly, however, the result is every way satisfactory."

"And may I inquire the subject which has perplexed you so much," said Walsingham, as his eye, following the direction of Mrs. Mortimer's, rested for a moment upon Isabel and her cousin.

"It is one which probably has never engaged your thoughts," was the answer; "but with me Mr. Wentworth is so great a favourite, that I have felt much interested in the remarkable change that has been visible in him since his return."

"He is altered, certainly, and for the better," replied Walsingham; "though I do not see why this should occasion surprise. He is older, and

graver I suppose in consequence, and his character seems now to have acquired a tone of dignity and worth that does him honour. His increased knowledge of the world has done wonders in his favour."

"I agree with you perfectly as to the beneficial results of the alteration, though not exactly as to its cause, which I can scarcely believe to have arisen entirely from his late wild expedition. I could wish indeed that the improved stability of his disposition had not been accompanied with such a marked increase of gravity, with the total failure of his former high spirits; but I must nevertheless feel proud that a woman's influence has, in this instance, wrought such beneficial effects; and that love, which has so often been accused of distracting lordly man from higher purposes, has by his beautiful cousin been employed to fortify the good qualities which will render her destiny a truly enviable one."

Completely roused from his indifference at this unexpected termination of Mrs. Mortimer's expressions of interest concerning Mr. Wentworth, Walsingham was on the point of replying with some warmth;—he checked himself, however, and Mrs. Mortimer proceeded with her observations, without noticing the effect they had produced.

"Like most of the neighbourhood, I thought for some time that Miss Isabel Wentworth was to marry Lord Lymington. But now I understand it perfectly. No one can look at Mr. Wentworth when engrossed as now, and doubt his attachment. What pleasure this must afford our good friend Sir Arthur, and how seldom is it that in these affairs inclination coincides so well with expediency!"

"Miss Isabel Wentworth has so many claimants for her favour," said Walsingham,

coldly, "that it is no wonder some doubt should exist as to the final object of her choice."

"We, at all events, Mr. Walsingham, cannot doubt the evidence of our senses; and Mr. Wentworth, at this moment, looks so extremely lover-like, that I am not afraid of being called on to alter my opinion. Indeed, did not every circumstance render the alliance a desirable one, I should consider him a most dangerous person to be constantly in the house with so young a girl; and from the first I was persuaded that if, as I believed, he was really attached to her, Mr. Wentworth would not fail to carry his point."

Quite satisfied with the proofs she had given of her own discernment, Mrs. Mortimer soon afterwards took her leave. On the following morning Sir Arthur was informed that business of importance had obliged Mr. Wal-

singham to return at an early hour to Marchwood ;—Isabel received no tidings of her lover, and he was seen no more at Wentworth Court during the whole of the day.

## CHAPTER II.

" C'est à moi de corriger mon gendre ;
Toi, tel qu'il est, c'est à toi de le prendre ;
De vous aimer, si vous pouvez, tous deux,
Et d' obeir à tout ce que je veux."

L' Enfant Prodigue.

Mrs. Compton had followed Alice from the breakfast room, and having with difficulty summoned courage to attempt another maternal lecture, was approaching in a delicate and circuitous manner, the subject she wished to introduce, when, with a countenance wearing one of its darkest frowns, Mr. Compton entered his daughter's apartment. The circumstance of his

appearing there at all, was sufficiently alarming to both ladies, to render them perfectly aware, before he opened his lips, that the object of his visit was not likely to be of a pleasing nature.

"Do not trouble yourself—I have no intention of remaining longer than the very few moments which will suffice to express my opinions and desires upon the subject which brought me hither," he began, as he rejected Mrs. Compton's offer of a seat. "You, Miss Compton, must, I should imagine, divine the purport of my visit, and can scarcely feel surprised, that the very extraordinary line of conduct it has lately been your pleasure to adopt, should not altogether meet with my approbation. Since what period, may I ask, has it been customary for a young woman, who professes to be so discreet as to refuse the slightest mark of preference to her future husband, to allow herself to be detained for the space of nearly a whole morning, alone with another gentleman, and

engaged in a conversation the most frivolous and absurd ?"

Mr. Compton paused, and his wife, always wretched at the prospect of Alice's becoming the object of her father's sarcastic violence, ventured to interpose :—

" Indeed, my dear Mr. Compton, there is evidently some mistake here; and if you will have the kindness to explain yourself to me, I will tell our dear girl what are your wishes, and you may depend upon their being complied with. You really are not aware how much your manner terrifies and distresses her."

" I must beg, Madam, that you will suffer me to consider myself quite capable of speaking to my daughter without your assistance. I have no greater apprehensions of finding any difficulty in making myself clearly understood, than of her being at all overcome by grief at having merited my reproof."

The apparent indifference with which Alice

remained, with her eyes fixed sullenly upon the book she held in her hand, certainly seemed to justify her father's remark; her mother being silenced, Alice found herself obliged to reply.

"I have to thank your favourite Dora, I conclude, for the account with which you have been furnished of my conduct. I cannot be answerable for the light in which it may be made to appear, if her malicious stories are to be credited."

"I am not apt to be deceived, Miss Compton; and whatever I may have heard, does but confirm my own impression of the extreme folly and impropriety of your behaviour. Positively, it required indeed the evidence of my own eyes, to convince me that my daughter could be seen permitting a stranger—not the man to whom she is about to be united—but the acquaintance of a day, familiarly to occupy himself in arranging the ridiculous ornaments with which it had been her pleasure to decorate her person!

Mark my words, however, Madam!—I am not to be trifled with,—neither is Colonel Lindesay; and if this strange intimacy be not broken off, before your future husband finds that he was deceived in the high opinion of you, which the knowledge of the care that has been wasted on your education, has led him to entertain—if, I say, by your continued levity of conduct, you forfeit this most desirable match, you shall repent of your folly to the last day of your life."

Without waiting for any reply, Mr. Compton quitted the room; and as soon as the door had closed after him, his wife said, in a soothing manner, addressing Alice, who had been effectually startled by her father's observation of her flirtation with Tresham, and his consequent anger,

"Do not be alarmed, love! this is some mischief of that child's doing, but it will all stop here—your father knows better than to make any disturbance. You have certainly been a

little incautious in showing the interest which Mr. Tresham's conversation naturally excited, and I really think Mr. Compton was right in fearing lest your lover might notice it."

"It cannot signify if he does. I am not yet surely such a slave to Colonel Lindesay, as to be forced to hide the satisfaction I may derive from conversing with the most agreeable man I have ever seen."

"Certainly not, my love; but then Colonel Lindesay's attachment may allowably cause him to feel mortified by your evidently preferring Mr. Tresham's society to his own. Of course you had no idea your father saw him arrange the flowers; and as Colonel Lindesay did not, it does not much signify; but you have allowed him terribly to monopolise your smiles lately, and you would scarcely speak to the Colonel yesterday, when he had made such a point of taking you in to dinner."

"I do not believe Colonel Lindesay cares

much about my smiles, and I would willingly dispense with his attentions. In promising to marry him, I should imagine that I had rather conferred than received a favour."

"There you are quite right; but his appreciation of his good fortune will make him guard his treasure the more carefully. It is not safe or prudent, dearest, believe me, to accept so much attention from a married man, and one who has been something of a *roué*, like Mr. Tresham. Nothing can be more hurtful to a young woman, than to be talked about with that kind of man, and your admirer is far too distinguished for his flattering assiduities to pass unnoticed."

"Mr. Tresham is certainly not likely to escape notice," observed Alice; "and I suppose I must give up talking to him, since I cannot venture to brave my father's anger. Promise me, however, in return, that you will persuade him not to hurry my marriage; and that you

will prevent my being again tormented on the subject, since that is not likely to render me more agreeable to Colonel Lindesay. His own manner is so cold and formal towards me, that I have never learnt to feel at ease with him; while with Mrs. Tresham and Miss Wentworth, he is totally different—I really think I have as good grounds for jealousy as he has."

"Nay, Alice, it is only since you have been so constrained towards him, that he has been less animated and agreeable with you, than he used to be. Now, you never speak to him, and look as cold and distant, as if he were a perfect stranger. How can he make himself pleasant?"

"He is perfectly welcome to behave as he pleases, and I only wish I were allowed the same liberty. That little wretch Dora must have told these tales."

"I cannot say how heartily I wish she had not been brought here; it really is the greatest

annoyance to me, to see her so uncouth and mischievous—and she is so unfortunately plain! Indeed, when I have lost my Alice, I know not what will become of me. Do not look melancholy, dearest!—remember, that your marriage will render you independent, and place you in that station which my Alice is so well qualified to adorn."

Impressing a kiss upon the fair forehead of her daughter, Mrs. Compton left her to consider what had passed, and to lament the sacrifice she was called upon to make, by depriving herself in some degree of the society so agreeable to her. Her meditations were disturbed not long afterwards by the entrance of Colonel Lindesay, the very person whom at that moment she most wished to avoid, and towards whom the parental admonitions she had been receiving, had by no means favourably disposed her.

"I thought you were going to Danesfield this

morning," she said abruptly, as he approached, and in a tone expressive of little pleasure at his change of purpose.

"No," he replied; "I remained at home, in order to ensure a few moment's conversation with you, and with the hope that I might thus obtain some explanation of what has both surprised and grieved me."

In considerable alarm, Alice softened her tone, willing if possible to escape his reproaches. "I am perfectly at a loss, Colonel Lindesay, to know to what you can allude; is it possible, that any of my actions have led to so unfortunate a result?"

"Miss Compton will, I hope, do me the justice to believe, that I am not actuated by any feeling of distrust, in addressing her in this manner. Far from considering jealousy a proof of affection, I hold it impossible for such an engagement as ours to subsist for a moment, with-

out unlimited confidence on both sides ; and I have no doubt that your own impulse would have led you to inform me without delay, if you felt the slightest repugnance towards its fulfilment."

Colonel Lindesay paused, but Alice remaining silent, he proceeded :

" I fear I have offended you, and yet it was with a very different intention that I sought to speak with you. It is for your own sake, as much as for mine, that I entreat you to be candid, to inform me why I have been lately treated with such mortifying disregard ; while yet you have fully proved, that you are not always thus reserved and silent ?"

Again Colonel Lindesay waited for a reply ; and now convinced of the necessity of caution, unless she would come to a rupture with him at once, it was couched by Alice in the most conciliatory phrases she could persuade herself to employ.

"I am sorry, Colonel Lindesay, that any part of my conduct should have been such as to induce you to think this formal explanation necessary. I am not so changeable, believe me, as to have ever entertained a wish to alter our relative situations."

"Then since that is the case, and I have not forfeited your good opinion, I trust that henceforth you will at least endeavour to bestow upon me a few of those smiles which have recently been engrossed by another, and which you still allow me the right to claim."

Alice's countenance did not wear at that instant an expression prophetic of many such favours, but having left it to her own candour and sense of propriety to be the guide of her conduct, Colonel Lindesay withdrew, while his fair betrothed remained in no enviable mood; yet convinced of the necessity of avoiding for the present the attentions of Tresham, and conceal-

ing the impression their judicious and flattering nature had produced, and which the persecution she had undergone had rather deepened than diminished.

## CHAPTER III.

"Alas that love, so gentle in his view,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!"
ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE disappearance of Mr. Walsingham from Wentworth Court, was partially explained to Sir Arthur on the following day, by the early arrival of a messenger from Marchwood, with a letter from that gentleman, wherein after stating that he had been detained away by business, relating to the final adjustment of the suit in Chancery, which had been so long in suspense, he proceeded to announce its being at length terminated in its favour. Freed from the great-

est part of those embarrassments which had occasioned Sir Arthur to defer to so distant a period his union with his niece, Walsingham trusted, that the desired consent would not longer be withheld, and that Isabel, if still unchanged in her feelings towards him, would not refuse, by a speedy ratification of their engagement, to relieve his mind from its late torturing uncertainties, nor unnecessarily delay conferring upon him a gift too precious for him calmly to contemplate the possibility of losing.

When Isabel obeyed the summons she received to the library, she found her uncle still employed in reperusing the epistle which a glance showed her to be from Walsingham. Having made her place herself beside him, Sir Arthur gave the letter into her hand, and watched, in silent anxiety, her changing countenance as she read it, and then remained for some minutes, her eyes fixed on the ground,

with an expression as grave and thoughtful as his own.

"Isabel, my child—for as such do I consider you—will you hear the words of one who has more experience than one so young as yourself, before you are influenced by the eloquence which your lover has doubtless exerted in the letter which he entreats me to deliver to you."

"Do you doubt my gratitude and respect for your advice, my dearest uncle?—Counsel me, direct me,—for indeed I know not what I ought to do."

The dejected accent in which Isabel spoke, convinced Sir Arthur that she also entertained doubts as to the prudence of complying with Mr. Walsingham's entreaties; and with yet more earnestness he continued,

"I believe you, Isabel; and I know that my opinions will be respected by you, nor should I wish them to exercise an undue influence over

the decision which you are yourself called on to make. In consenting to your union with Mr. Walsingham, for whom I entertain the highest esteem and regard, I considered that I acted as might most tend to promote your happiness, since he had won your young and guileless heart. From what I have lately observed, however, I cannot feel as certain as I could desire of your marriage with him procuring for you all the domestic felicity which you so fully deserve. With the circumstances to which I allude, you are better acquainted than I can be. Be not hurried, however, upon what is irrevocable. Do not let your lover's impetuosity lead you to venture prematurely on a step which you have hitherto regarded as remote; and above all, consider whether the very anxiety which he testifies on this occasion, does not indicate a want of confidence, which his knowledge of the artless and candid nature of my child, ought effectually to have precluded.

Sir Arthur paused, and Isabel endeavoured to suppress the emotion excited by his kindness, and by the uneasiness which she only too clearly perceived to be just. Sir Arthur, however, without allowing her to answer, proceeded :

" Do not reply now, my love ; let your own sense of what is right be your guide, rather than my judgment. Consider every thing well, and when you have duly weighed the nature of the change which involves the dearest interests of your heart, depend upon me to extricate you from any embarrassment, and to reconcile Mr. Walsingham to the necessity of curbing his impatience, and proving himself worthy of the inestimable treasure which he thus hastily calls upon me to resign."

An hour of solitude spent in the consideration of the arguments of her uncle, and the letters of Walsingham, decided Isabel as to the course she should pursue ; and when Melicent entered the apartment where Sir Arthur had insisted

that Isabel should be left undisturbed for some time, she found her pale indeed, but collected; and although the smile with which she was received was evidently forced, and the firmness for which Isabel had been striving, nearly gave way before the overpowering emotion of Melicent, yet when she at length broke the long silence which had accompanied the embrace of the orphan sisters, her voice did not falter, though its accents were low and mournful.

"Melicent, I fear that my decision will grieve you all, and nothing but the strongest conviction that I am right, could enable me to resolve as I have done."

"You cannot mean, Isabel, that you will obey this mandate, for it is little less; that you will yield to Mr. Walsingham's tormenting jealousy, and go from us all to a home, which there can exist no doubt that his disposition will render a miserable one to you."

"Do not speak thus, I entreat you; believe

me, it has cost me greatly to be convinced that my duty lies this way—that Mr. Walsingham, however much I may regret his want of confidence in my affection, has a right to demand that I should not unnecessarily prolong his suspense."

"But he has no right to doubt you, Isabel; have you not done every thing to dispel his unworthy suspicions? Could you do more, if you were his wife? For your own sake—for those so deeply interested in your future happiness, do not sacrifice every thing to one who ill repays your trust. Let me speak to Mr. Walsingham,—let me learn from him, what new phantasy has possessed him; and do you, dearest, if you love me, at least delay to fix your destiny thus rashly and irreparably."

"I had expected that you, Melicent, would rather confirm me in the right course, than seek to make me depart from it. So sacred is our engagement in my eyes, that I already consider

myself as much bound by it to Mr. Walsingham, as if actually his wife. Could you prove to me, that he was wanting in those higher principles which are of such deep import; then indeed, were I at the altar by his side, I would retract my promise. But no arguments can avail to induce me, from selfish regard for my own tranquillity, to break off so holy a contract, and leave him to the misery of his own feelings. Walsingham is unhappy, he says, and ought I to refuse to terminate the suspense which grieves him, and confirm his fears by delaying what is inevitable? On your generosity and kindness I must depend for your not employing the influence you have always possessed over me, to shake my purpose. Why should you question my happiness?—it is scarcely strange that Walsingham, seeing me gay and surrounded with friends, should imagine that I may repent the sacrifice I make for him; and you will own, that there is nothing to condemn in the earnest-

ness with which he entreats me to banish, by my consent, all doubts for ever from his mind."

"Alas, Isabel! I fear that has been more than once already promised," said her sister, mournfully, as Isabel placed in her hand the appeal of her lover to her feelings and generosity. As Isabel retraced in thought the passionate lines which Melicent was reading with eyes dimmed by tears, she again looked forward with hope to a future that no longer appeared gloomy; and Melicent, convinced at length that her gentle sister was firm in her purpose, reluctantly consented to inform Sir Arthur of her decision.

"Isabel has determined for herself," said Sir Arthur, gravely; "and her compliance with his wishes, must satisfy Mr. Walsingham of the unreasonableness of his doubts. His reference to me is next to be considered, and before I consent to the hasty measures he desires, I must be convinced that your sister is not laying the

foundation for future unhappiness by her generous confidence. My answer to Mr. Walsingham will therefore state my intention of taking the subject into serious deliberation, and apprise him, that on what I may now and hereafter observe of his conduct, will principally depend the course I may pursue."

In gloomy solitude, meanwhile, Walsingham awaited the decision of Isabel, which he scarcely doubted would condemn him to a yet longer endurance of the distracting jealousy which had prevented his deriving gratification from the knowledge that he was at last disencumbered of the embarrassments which had during his whole life weighed him down, and which were now removed, at the very time when he had grown reckless as to his future fate. As he paced the deserted halls of Marchwood, he thought with bitterness, that their gloom was probably never destined to be chased away by the pre-

sence of her whose assurance of answering affection had roused his ardent devotion; and while his hatred encreased against the man whom he believed to have ruined his prospects, he dwelt with indignation upon the incapacity which he ascribed to Isabel, of feeling and returning a love so fervent as his own. With keen self-reproaches, he at length read the warm and artless expressions of Isabel's sympathy in his good fortune, and of her readiness to comply with his wishes, which even on his mind operated with instantaneous conviction, and brought him ere long repentant, yet exulting, to her side.

Once more restored to the better feelings of his nature, Walsingham believed the recurrence of his former doubts impossible, and entertained no fear of quickly convincing Sir Arthur of the groundlessness of his apprehensions; and Isabel, that she had not erred in her

confidence, and that by her generous candour, she had effectually and for ever silenced the suspicions upon which he now looked back with shame and wonder.

## CHAPTER IV.

"I think, to be an honest yeoman's wife,
You were cut out by nature."

HONEY MOON.

THE entertainment which had been so pompously announced by Lord Chellingham was now looked forward to by the neighbourhood with anxiety, as it was supposed that the festivities would be ordered in a style of magnificence proportioned to the wealth and consequence of the stately Earl. Mr. Walsingham, forced reluctantly to quit home for a few days, fixed his return for the day preceding this im-

portant event; and, strong in his present good resolutions, left without apprehension his betrothed during a brief interval unguarded, save by the feelings which he had at length been taught more fully to appreciate.

"Have you forgotten, Melicent, your desire to visit our old Manor Farm at Yatton?" inquired Mr. Wentworth, on meeting his cousin one morning before breakfast.

"On the contrary, it is still in its force, and I only want a companion of equal hardihood in braving the cold. Will you venture, Miss Compton, on an expedition unsuited, it seems, for less adventurous spirits than ours?"

Alice had lately been too much occupied with her own affairs to think much of her resentment against Melicent, with whom, too, she had been more in charity since she fancied she had eclipsed her in the eyes of Mr. Tresham. Her answer, therefore, was expressive of a corresponding wish for the excursion; and notwith-

standing the misgivings of Sir Arthur, it was agreed that, the day being tolerably fine, those disposed for the ride should set forth in company immediately after breakfast.

A cold and piercing wind blew over the bleak hills they had soon to traverse, yet no complaints were heard from any of the party of the hardships they were voluntarily undergoing. Melicent and her cousin, little gratified by the aspect assumed by affairs between Isabel and the now absent Walsingham, were glad, by any change of place, to obtain a diversion of thought; —the active habits of Colonel Lindesay and Lord Lymington rendered them indifferent to most changes of atmosphere; and Tresham, while professing himself astonished at the extraordinary madness which exposed them all to be frozen to death in a search after the picturesque, easily convinced the fair Alice that the power of her charms had alone induced him to brave such imminent peril.

Thus they rode along, laughing and talking gaily, beneath the clouded and wintry sky;—and they were anticipating, with some pleasure, the bright fire which Max assured them his old woman would be certain to have burning, when, not a little to their dismay, large flakes of snow began to fall; and as they looked at the thickening atmosphere, the apprehension obtruded itself of having to retrace the long miles they had come, in a snow-storm; which, it could not but be confessed, appeared inevitable. Quickening their pace, Melicent and Alice followed the advice of their cavaliers that they should hasten on, as speedily as possible, towards their destined place of shelter, now announced to be not far off. Before it was attained, however, fast and thick fell the snow-flakes upon them; and it was a welcome sight when Yatton Manor was at length pointed out in the distance.

The bleak country they had at first crossed had latterly been exchanged for one of greater

interest. The hills rose more abruptly on either hand, and their declivities were clothed with ancient woods that must, in their summer aspect, have rendered the scene pleasing and beautiful. As they approached the antiquated fortress, which still retained vestiges of its feudal defences of drawbridge and portcullis, and which was encircled by a wide and deep moat, the ground gradually ascended, and the building and its quadrangular court, filled with old and stately trees, occupied the summit of a steep eminence; which, on one side, sank abruptly down to the valley beneath, in a manner that must have rendered it a place of considerable strength, in the days when little else than its capability of defence was regarded as of importance to a knightly dwelling.

Of rude and simple sculpture, the old walls could boast of little but the strength that had so long resisted the ravages of time; and the ivy and crimson-berried holly clustering round the

narrow and deeply-set casements, seemed almost too fragile as ornaments for the massive work of the Norman architect. Unable to bestow much notice on what was before them, our party hurried through the blinding snow across the intervening space, and were guided by Max to the entrance of that part of the building appropriated to the use of the farmer and his family. Here admittance was quickly gained; and in a few moments they were all assembled round the fire blazing in the large hall now serving for a kitchen, but which had formerly been the scene of many a splendid banquet. The good old dame, who had been busied in preparing her husband's dinner, was thrown into considerable confusion by this unexpected inroad upon the privacy of her domestic avocations; and it was some time before she had sufficiently collected herself to send her pretty daughter Lucy to light fires in the various apartments, in order that the ladies might not be

exposed to cold while engaged in their inspection; her visitors consenting, without reluctance, to maintain their present comfortable position until the more dignified parts of the mansion should assume a less frigid temperature.

Their patience was not put to a very long trial,—their nimble handmaid soon returning to conduct them through a long passage to another hall of the same spacious dimensions with the first, and of which the windows commanded a view of the abrupt declivity beneath the building. The prospect was anything rather than inspiriting. A white veil had already been spread over the surrounding fields by the thickly falling snow; and the appearance of the sky seemed, even to the most sanguine, to afford no hope of improvement in the state of the weather. No remark, however, was made on the subject, since nothing comforting could be suggested; and turning from the dreary contemplation, all sought again to interest themselves in

their present examination. Several apartments, each affording different vestiges of antiquity, opened from the hall. One of these, a large, low room, looking into the court-yard, was said to have been that used by Sir Arthur, on his former visits to the old place; and its tapestried hangings, an old-fashioned bookcase at the farther end, and the apparatus for shooting and fishing arranged over the mantel-piece, certainly gave it a less comfortless air than most of the other deserted chambers.

Above stairs, the principal object of curiosity was a gallery containing various portraits, whose age was their chief recommendation to notice; and after surveying these, and two or three small turreted apartments opening at either extremity of the corridor, our party desisted from farther prosecution of their ramble through the dismantled rooms, and returned to the tapestried parlour, where the care of Max's old friend had covered the table with homely but

comfortable refreshments. Over these they were still loitering, unwilling to quit their present warm quarters for the long and unpleasant ride before them, yet convinced of the imprudence of delay; when Mr. Wentworth, who had gone out to order the horses, returned with the intelligence that he had just encountered a servant of Mr. Tresham's, despatched from Wentworth Court by Sir Arthur, to beg that his master would not allow Miss Compton and Miss Wentworth to think of returning that afternoon, since there was no reason why they should not be tolerably comfortable where they were, and their attempting to ride back in the present state of the weather would be imprudent and dangerous.

With a sensation of relief at this announcement, Melicent and her friends returned from gazing upon the louring heavens and drifting snow, towards the cheerful fire, to consult upon the measures next to be pursued.

"Since Sir Arthur has entrusted you to my

care," said Tresham to Melicent and Alice, "I shall enter upon my arduous office by insisting on your divesting yourselves of those habits, which it is my pleasure to consider must be damp; and I positively forbid all farther conversation until this necessary precaution shall have been taken."

Tresham's fair wards readily complied with his injunction; and, by the willing assistance of their pretty handmaiden, in addition to the scanty appliances for the toilette which the servant had found it possible to convey from Wentworth Court, they were enabled, before they reappeared, to arrange their costume in a manner more adapted for comfort than their riding habiliments would have permitted, though somewhat differing in its rustic simplicity from their ordinary garb.

Although more cheerful than the rest of the mansion, the apartment they had selected for the general occupation had been too long unte-



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nanted not to wear a comfortless aspect; and the oaken table and few high-backed chairs which formed its scanty proportion of furniture, seemed to afford no hope of amelioration by any possible variety in their arrangement. Lymington declared that he must go and consult Lucy on the subject, observing at the same time,

"Really, Max, your partiality for this venerable ancestral residence, and for the specimen of modern antiquity presented by our good hostess, now appears not wholly irrational; and all I find to condemn is, that you should not sooner have made a point of ascertaining whether our pretty serving-maiden had preserved in proper order the interesting relics for which so lively a regard was professed by Dr. Lambert and yourself."

While Tresham and Alice commented upon the disconsolate appearance of things, Melicent was more usefully employed in collecting, with

Max's assistance, whatever desirable articles capable of transport the other apartments offered to their choice; and, by the time they had placed a large old folding-screen so as to keep the draughts from the fireside, drawn round it various antique seats and couches, and arranged some of the tapestry hangings as curtains to the windows, a manifest improvement was effected in their *séjour* for the evening, to which Melicent laughingly declared, when, having completed her labours, she assumed her place by the fire, that it was now impossible for the most fastidious person to offer any objection.

Tresham, meanwhile, had seemed to find sufficient pleasure in watching her graceful movements as she passed from room to room, while he remained by the side of Alice in perfect idleness; and Lindesay, though somewhat more active in his attempts to assist her, had certainly allowed his eyes to be constantly employed in the same unprofitable manner.

" It is a singular fact," said the former, " that we are seldom placed by nature in the stations we are most calculated to adorn! No one can deny that Miss Wentworth, in her late useful avocations, has evinced capabilities not to be surpassed by the most notable housewife. And yet her lot is unfortunately cast in such a manner that, excepting on rare occasions like the present, her talents will probably want an opportunity for exercise."

" We cannot accuse the Fates of having committed any mistake in placing Mr. Tresham above the necessity for useful exertion!" said Melicent. " On the contrary, it would have been most barbarous to have left him to depend for support upon those powers of activity which, at present, have only enabled him to laugh at those who are toiling for the comfort of such lazy individuals as himself and Miss Compton."

" Really, Miss Wentworth," said Alice, with unusual good humour, " it was quite a shame

for me not to assist you; but, indeed, you and Mr. Wentworth seemed to leave nothing for any one else to do."

"Depend upon it, Miss Compton, our wisest plan was to do nothing. There is Lindesay has been trying to be useful, and without shining in any way, or doing the slightest good, has given himself a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Now Miss Wentworth and her cousin were evidently originally destined to keep a farm; and, were Sir Arthur here, he would bestow his blessing upon the young people, and perhaps a little something to help them on in the world, and then they might follow the bent of their own inclinations, and supply his honour's household with their best turkeys and chickens out of gratitude."

"I think Miss Wentworth will scarcely agree with you," said Lindesay, "as to the superior felicity of conducting the *ménage* at the Manor Farm to that of Wentworth Court. At present

she is only exerting the feminine power of giving, in a few moments, a domestic charm to the most homely and unpromising locality; and the faculty will remain the same, however different may be the materials upon which it is exercised."

"You have bribed him, Miss Wentworth, to declare you worthy of a loftier destination than I have assigned to you, by the gift of that chair, which, in comparison with the delectable sofa allotted to Miss Compton and myself, appears perfectly luxurious. Any unprejudiced person would have seen that you were in your proper element with your very efficient assistant. Could anything be more becoming than that quaintly fanciful garb? It does not sit half so naturally upon Miss Compton, who might be enacting some princess in disguise, or going to a fancy-ball. I do not think I should much object to changing places with our friend Max for a short time, with such an active and notable

helpmate to prevent my fatiguing myself too much."

"Oh no! you really must excuse me," exclaimed Melicent. "Whatever my *forte* may be, yours certainly does not lie in making yourself useful; and besides the multifarious labours that would fall upon me, instead of helping me, like Max, you would give me no end of trouble to prevent your interfering with and spoiling all my excellent arrangements."

"Take care that I do not avenge myself by betraying your newly-discovered tastes in a quarter where they would certainly not be regarded as an additional charm. Lindesay was right in encouraging you to hope for better materials to work upon; but the stately decorations of Chellingham Castle look as if they would be greatly astonished if hereafter put to rights by your own fair hands; and I can imagine the horror of their lord at detecting you in the act of deranging the solemn uniformity of

his halls, in order to make things look a little comfortable."

The dinner, which in its preparation had cost considerable pains to Lucy and her mother, now made its appearance; and after the conclusion of the repast, Melicent and Alice, leaving their companions, resorted to the upper apartments to ascertain what chance might exist of their obtaining accommodation for the night of a more comfortable description than the state-bed wherein, according to tradition, King Edward the Third had once slept, and which, in its present crazy condition, inspired them with no wish to convert it to the use of less exalted personages. There were plenty of chambers at their disposal, it was true, but their dilapidated state rendered many contrivances necessary before they could be considered tenantable; and Alice, soon wearying of occupation so ungenial, and leaving Melicent and Lucy to their labours, returned to the gallery, where a bright

fire was burning, and placing herself on an old settee near it, remained there until the entrance of Mr. Tresham aroused her from the abstraction into which she had fallen.

## CHAPTER V.

"The lady blushed red, but nothing she said,
Nor answered the Baron a word;
Then she stepped down the stair to her chamber fair,
And so did her moody lord."

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IMMEDIATELY taking the place by her side, Tresham exclaimed,

"May I congratulate myself on the good fortune which guided my steps hither?—Or am I to suppose that you will still oblige me to endure the same frigidity and silence to which I have latterly been condemned?"

Alice, whose countenance denoted anything rather than displeasure at this interruption of her

solitary musings, turned towards him with a smile as she replied,

" I hope you too are not going to expostulate with me on my conduct! I assure you I am quite tired of the subject; but any other I shall like of all things to talk about "

" Since Lindesay is for a wonder off guard, this hour is my own, and must first be employed in asking why you have lately been so cold and altered. The smiles I have to-day seen on your countenance have been the first with which you have favoured me for ages."

" You must not be angry with me, Mr. Tresham. I have been plagued to death for bestowing too many smiles—too much attention upon you ;—and you must not expect me to speak to you before my father."

" Your father! and is Miss Compton subjected to such tyranny? Surely a jealous lover must be enough to try any woman's patience, without the interference of a person who can

understand nothing of the business, and has no sort of occasion to trouble himself about it."

"You do not know my father, or you would not imagine that he would allow any of us to conduct our affairs peaceably. My mother has no kind of influence, and my amiable sister is employed as a spy upon my actions."

"Your miseries are more than can be borne! The moment that rescues her from them, and places her in independence, will probably be welcomed by Miss Compton with more pleasure than may be desired by others than the fortunate Lindesay."

"Oh! he, too, thought it necessary, after my father had been storming till he was tired, to come and talk mysteriously about my smiles being bestowed upon another. Whom could he mean, Mr. Tresham? You say I have done nothing but frown lately?"

"May I interpret that arch expression as I could wish? May I hope that it is since they

have tormented you thus that you have been so grave and thoughtful, and not that I have incurred your anger? Or, if I have been so unfortunate,—tell me, I entreat you, how I have offended,—how I may win back, if it be possible, your favour?"

"Do not be so foolish, Mr. Tresham? You know very well that I am not angry with you in the least, and that I like talking to you of all things when I dare do so,—only, before my father you must not pay me any attention."

"Believe me, I care little for your compelled frowns, if I have your assurance that your will would convert them into smiles. No! reserve your formal civility for Lindesay, so long as you accord to me the far more precious gift of one stolen interview like this."

As Tresham spoke, he ventured to press the fair hand that lay upon the couch between them; and though Alice, blushing deeply, with-

drew it, yet her anger upon the occasion appeared by no means implacable.

"I will not speak at all, Mr. Tresham, if you are so encroaching! All I meant was that I liked talking to you very well; but you will soon, it seems, force me to alter my opinion."

"You are no true woman," was the reply, "if the knowledge of the effect of your charms prejudice you against me. Be merciful, however;—tell me that, if I bear your severity patiently, I may sometimes see you under more favourable auspices—that you will not submit to constant surveillance—or I will not answer for my powers of endurance."

"Now what would you have me do? I am sure there are a thousand times when you may talk to me if you like, without making it as conspicuous as you have done;—but you must promise to behave better than you have done to-day, or else I will not speak to you;—and certainly I

am not going to make assignations with you, if that was what you meant!"

"Where favour is so scantily accorded, we learn to be thankful for small measures of grace! You have at least forgiven me all past offences, and the future lies in my own power."

Alice turned away her head to avoid his gaze, and as she did so, her eyes met those of Colonel Lindesay fixed upon herself and Tresham, with an expression denoting little satisfaction at the agreeable situation of his betrothed.

"You will find lights in the sitting-room, Miss Compton," he said, in a tone that made the terrified Alice quickly rise from her seat. "Let me recommend our common apartment as a more eligible sojourn than the one you have chosen."

While Alice prepared to comply with this advice, Tresham laughingly whispered, "Now, indeed, I can pity your distresses, for your Ogre looks a very picture of ferocity!" The fami-

liarity of these words, which were audible to Lindesay, by no means tended to abate his anger; Melicent, who had entered the gallery from the opposite side almost at the same moment with himself, now hastened forward, with considerable alarm, to Alice's assistance, and they descended to the parlour in some trepidation respecting the sequel of their adventure.

"We have not half appreciated this delightful old place," said Tresham, when they had again drawn round the fire, with a diminution, however, of the cordiality which had hitherto prevailed; and the change in their relative positions occasioned by Lindesay's preventing Tresham from resuming his station by the side of Miss Compton. "I begin to feel its influence stealing over me, and inspiring most romantic imaginings. Could any spot be found more fitly adapted for the abode wherein some unfortunate fair one might be immured by her jealous and tyrant lord? Her sole occupation pacing that

interesting gallery above,—her only solace the nocturnal strains of her faithful troubadour under her grated lattice!"

"And do you think such solace would be long permitted her, Mr. Tresham?" asked Lindesay. "Your troubadour might find his a hazardous experiment, with a guardian so vigilant to form another auditor of his nightly serenades."

"It would be strange if a woman's wit did not secure the continuance of her solitary gratification," said Tresham, carelessly. "After a day spent in tears, interrupted only by the consideration how she might best obtain her evening's concert, the Ogre must be a perfect Argus, and more sharp-witted than such monsters are usually depicted, if she did not gain her point at last."

"There is an old legend connected with this place," said Max, "which tends to controvert your idea of the security with which disconsolate dames may look for amusement from abroad.

Our old ancestor Sir Max, if we may believe reports to which my good uncle ever religiously abstains from alluding, found a most summary mode of checking a similar enlivenment of his dreary fortress during his absence."

"Oh, tell us the story, Max," said Melicent. "All that we want to complete the interest of our romantic sojourn is some tale of the olden time;—only, pray relate it more in the proper heroic style than your commencement seems to promise."

"In days of yore," began Max, ignorant how little gratification Colonel Lindesay was deriving from the subject selected by Tresham, "when England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth of awful memory, the Manor of Yatton was the abode of a stalwart knight, who, after many years of wanderings in foreign lands, suddenly returned to his own country, bringing back with him a beautiful bride, who was said to be of Spanish extraction. Sir Max was of a stern and

morose disposition, and it was whispered that his lady led but an unhappy life, and that her days were principally passed in grief and lamentations. At length a change appeared. The duties of his high station frequently obliged her lord to attend the court; and during one of these absences, a cavalier arrived at the castle, and met with a joyful welcome from the lady, who affirmed him to be her countryman and near kinsman, and one who brought news of her parents and home. Smiles were now seen to visit the lovely Spaniard's countenance, but they lasted not long—a yet deeper gloom than usual gathered on the brow of Sir Max, when he unexpectedly returned to his castle. The cavalier disappeared—the lady was immured and closely watched in the turret which we visited to-day. She died not long afterwards—of grief, it is to be supposed, for the loss of her lover, concerning whose fate dark tales were afloat, which the power and influence of Sir

Max were not wholly able to silence. No public inquiry, however, was made into the affair, though additional confirmation was given to the suspicions of the peasantry by the strange sounds and sights which, as Lucy will inform you, are still to be heard and seen in the vicinity of that lonely tower, and by Sir Max's departure from Yatton, which he never again visited, spending the remainder of his life in unbroken solitude, at his newly-erected dwelling of Wentworth Court."

"That poor caballero! I am really much interested about what became of him," remarked Tresham. "He seems to have been a most constant and praiseworthy individual; but his chance of life, I fear, was not great—Sir Max would soon put an end to him, unmindful of the improvement his presence might have effected in his *ménage*. Jealousy always blinds a man to his real interests. A little variety, in such a case as the present, is highly conducive to con-

jugal felicity. The fair prisoner of the Tower, if indulged with the society so agreeable to her, would have been doubly disposed to exert herself to please her formidable guardian, and, after listening to eloquence of a different nature, might have found a little dignified sublimity quite a refreshing change."

As he concluded speaking, Tresham rose with the utmost nonchalance, and stationing himself behind the chair of Alice, again in a low voice addressed her, with so familiar an air, that Lindesay, unable longer to curb his resentment, suddenly said, as he also rose and turned towards Melicent and Alice,

"You must both, I am convinced, have been fatigued by your exertions to-day. The hour is late, and you had certainly better no longer defer retiring."

Without taking any notice of the surprise created by his words and manner, he then gave Miss Compton her light, and in silence opened

the door for their departure. His mandate was submissively obeyed—Alice, completely subdued, was accompanied by Melicent to her apartment, to allay those terrors which in her, however, were merely occasioned by selfish regard for her own comfort. The far greater alarm experienced by Melicent was yet more increased by encountering, on her return through the gallery, Max and Lymington on their way to their destined rooms, and by hearing the door closed again of that wherein Tresham and Lindesay were thus left together in so unfriendly a mood. Listening to every sound, she sat in her desolate chamber, dreading the consequences of a meeting prolonged under similar untoward circumstances. More than an hour passed away, and still the silence which reigned unbroken through the mansion, except by the wind that was howling without, proved that they still remained together.

After enduring as long as she could her

painful suspense, Melicent stole softly down the staircase, and advanced a little way along the hall, with some vague hope of being relieved from her apprehensions. This was done more effectually than she could have expected by the sound of Tresham's laugh, and her being able to distinguish the amicable tone of their voices. Surprised, though reassured, Melicent returned to her comfortless apartment, and heard, not long before day-break, the footsteps of the seemingly reconciled rivals seeking the chambers destined for their occupation.

## CHAPTER VI.

" Ah! dans le siècle où nous sommes,
Comment se fier aux hommes ?
Il n'est plus de loyauté,
Ni bonne foi, ni probité ;
Tout est ruse et fausseté,
Et toujours les plus coupables
Sont, hélas! les plus aimables !
C'est dommage, en vérité !"

Still uncertain as to the influence of their nocturnal colloquy upon the minds of Tresham and Lindesay, Melicent delayed as long as she could, the next morning, her descent to the tapestried parlour. Although thankful that no

quarrel appeared to have arisen from the behaviour which she could not but consider highly blameable in Mr. Tresham, she found it difficult even to conjecture what could have passed to disarm Colonel Lindesay's anger, and was forced at last to conclude, that out of delicacy for Miss Compton's position and her own, all animosity between them was for the present to be concealed.

When influenced by the recollection that Alice's situation was far more embarrassing than hers, she sought her apartment, in order to afford her the support of her company to the breakfast room, Melicent found that Miss Compton, less acutely susceptible on such points, had already preceded her thither; and the whole party, when assembled, seemed to wear an aspect of cordiality, sufficiently perplexing under the circumstances she had imagined. Before its influence, however, her embarrassment subsided, and she was at leisure to receive the

intelligence which was now communicated to her, of the impossibility of a removal from their present quarters, during that day at least, owing to the depth of the snow drifts in many parts of the narrow cross road, by which alone Yatton Manor was to be approached. The gentlemen of the party seemed readily to reconcile themselves to their unavoidable detention, and were already busied in preparing whatever shooting apparatus could be mustered, in order, as Lymington declared, by laying in a supply of snipes and wildfowl, to keep famine from their stronghold as long as possible. He was endeavouring, as they took their places at the breakfast table, to extract from Alice an admission that she, like himself, had been haunted all night by the ghosts of the Spanish lady and her lover. As for Miss Wentworth, he said, she had certainly been visited by an apparition early in the night, for when he and Max had encountered her in the gallery, the traces of

some recent alarm were sufficiently evident, and either this, or the pale light of the torch she carried, had given her so truly spectral an appearance, that her image had been woven in his visions, in a manner less agreeable than might have been expected.

Melicent had suppressed, as far as she was able, the regret she felt, principally on her sister's account, at being kept so long away from Wentworth Court: her regret, however, was apparent, even to Alice, who observed,—

"Miss Wentworth is kind enough to pity the grief her absence will occasion, should it last beyond to-morrow. I am very comfortable, and do not care how long we stay here; but poor Lord Chellingham would think all his trouble thrown away, were her presence at last wanting at his ball. But I suppose we shall be able to get away before that time."

"There can be no doubt of it," said Lindesay; "and I see little occasion for Wentworth's em-

ploying his labourers in clearing a passage. In my opinion, we need only wait with our arms folded, for the approach of the regiment of pioneers that will doubtless be despatched by his lordship to extricate from her thraldom the lady of his revels."

"My ideas upon that subject," said Tresham, "have undergone considerable alteration. Miss Wentworth evinces such disregard, not only for pomp and station, but for the wealth of Ind, and the accomplishments which have had the advantage of display among the best foreign circles, that I perceive her thoughts incline towards domestic felicity in a quiet way. Wentworth Court suits her—she has got accustomed to its ways, and I look forward with infinite gratification to another season like the present, when, still under her auspices, we may again, I trust, assemble within Sir Arthur's hospitable halls."

"For my part, I am little disposed to antici-

pate with pleasure the events of another year," said Lymington, with unusual gravity. "One grows intolerably weary of for ever forming fresh plans, and having nothing but one's own selfish gratification to consult. Yet as long as a man has no domestic charm to attach him to his own fireside, he must remain a wanderer; and I do not see how I can better employ the spring which will be so fraught with interest to many of you, than in the execution of a project, whereof the specimen we have here of frost and snow has served to remind me. I shall go to Norway, and while I am crossing its icy mountains and pine forests, ties will be forming among my more fortunate friends, which will effectually prevent my being even missed from their yet more closely united circle. I was once in hopes, Max, of persuading you to accompany me."

"Had I not so long tried my uncle's patience, and wasted so many years in unprofitable adven-

tures," replied Maximilian, "I should have offered to be your companion on an expedition to a country still affording so much novelty. But whatever events may deprive Wentworth Court of its cheerful aspect, there henceforth am I fixed, and while your pleasure is to follow each new fancy, instead of the more permanent happiness which it is at any time in your power to seek, I must endeavour, in the various responsibilities devolving on me, to banish those feelings to which you have alluded, and for which I certainly cannot plead the excuse of inaction."

Alice's fears of being called upon by Lindesay to account for her behaviour on the previous evening, caused her to make her escape with a book in her hand immediately after breakfast; while Melicent stationed herself at the window, and commenced sketching the ivy-covered walls of the ancient chapel which lay immediately across the court-yard. The sun

was now shining brightly on the snow, and the old ruins, seen through the trunks of the elm trees in the court, looked highly picturesque in their wintry garb. Her companions had all sallied forth, with the exception of Lindesay, who, returning to the room just as they were departing, had apparently forgotten his intention of accompanying them, as he stood watching her pencil, and occasionally taking it from her hand, to give by his bolder touches the effect that seemed wanting to her drawing.

"It is really unpardonable in you to accomplish so readily what I have been unsuccessfully aiming at this half-hour," said Melicent. "I ought indeed to be grateful for your assistance, in commemorating a spot which has proved little less than magical in some of its effects—which made, as he affirms, Mr. Tresham romantic last night, and Lord Lymington sentimental this morning."

"I cannot imagine that such a mood will be

of long duration with Lymington," answered Lindesay. "It will probably vanish when the first snipe or fieldfare falls a victim to his gun. His is no unenviable disposition, finding pleasure in every situation, and able to amuse himself with such effusions as that of to-day, when he has nothing else to do. The fair Lucy was probably lighting the fires, and could not renew the ghost-stories, by which he declares she so deeply interested him last night."

"Certainly no one can deny that he possesses in an enviable degree the faculty of being amused," said Melicent; "but Lord Lymington has also other still more valuable qualities, which must make him a favourite wherever he is known."

"Believe me, I had no intention of implying that Frank was deficient in more sterling attributes. I only referred to his sentimentality of this morning, which did not appear to me of a permanent nature. Had your cousin, Mr.

Wentworth, advanced such opinions, I should have attached greater weight to them, since it would not have been the first time that I have thought his mind not quite so much at ease as his manners would denote. More than a campaign with General Evans must have been required to transform him from the gay, thoughtless boy every one describes him to have been before he left Wentworth Court, into the considerate reflecting man he has now become."

"May not regret for having wounded the feelings and disobeyed the commands of so kind an uncle have wrought the change?" inquired Melicent.

"In part it might have done so," replied her companion; "but not so total an alteration as has taken place here. No, Miss Wentworth, there is only one influence strnog enough to ripen at once all those good seeds which have hitherto lain dormant in a man's character. It is woman's power that best avails to teach him

the truer and nobler ends of existence, and first to awaken him to a knowledge of himself and his responsibilities. He who leads a solitary life, unloving and unloved, remains a stranger to the only happiness worth seeking; and yet, so imperfect is our judgment," he continued, in an altered tone, "so liable are we to error, in the mode of seeking that happiness, that the safer plan is, perhaps, to abstain from its quest, rather than incur the risk of misery, great in proportion to our estimation of the blessing we have failed to win."

"I do not understand you to-day, Colonel Lindesay," said Melicent, looking up in some surprise. "Are you advocating or depreciating matrimonial felicity?"

"I hardly understand myself, Miss Wentworth," he replied. "If I am depreciating it, however, it must be like the fox in the fable. I stand alone in the world, and with only too vivid a sense of the delights attendant upon such a communion of heart and soul as my

dreams have painted, I shall yet be forced to go back to my mountain den, and there turn hermit or savage."

"I cannot fear a similar destiny befalling you, Colonel Lindesay, to whom constant and useful exertion seems familiar. To me, indeed, men appear so much more accustomed to find their principal employments and diversions abroad, that I have always been inclined to imagine, that it is to my own sex that domestic ties are most necessary, and that it is very excusable, if they are sometimes made the object of too much consideration by women."

"Are you their advocate, Miss Wentworth?" said Lindesay: "when I remember what I have heard from others, I could almost venture to ask, why then do you act in direct opposition to your avowed principles?"

"Perhaps," answered Melicent, colouring a little, "because I do regard the subject as one of so much consequence. Can a woman who is

aware that her decision involves the whole of her future destiny, make that decision lightly? Can she allow wealth or station, or even brilliancy of talent, unless accompanied by more sterling attributes, to influence her choice?—Oh no! she will look for one whose superior mind, regulated by high and unerring principles, may enable her to regard her husband as her guide and instructor.—She would tremble at the idea of taking so solemn a vow, unless certain that, in essentials at least, she had not been deceived —and then, when this was done, when the vow was taken, her happiness would, in some degree, be in her own power: the possible asperities or imperfections which might discover themselves in his character, her influence ought to be sufficient to soften, while his greater energy and more elevated tone of mind would raise and strengthen hers!"

"And is this the picture you have connected with such a state?—this your estimate of the

duties of a wife, Miss Wentworth? Fool that I was, ever to think coldness and reserve the accompaniments of female perfection!—Too late I am undeceived! — While debarred from aspiring to its possession, I learn to appreciate all that is most lovely, most excellent in woman, and discover my love, my adoration, to be irrevocably fixed, after having rendered myself, by my own folly, unworthy of ever obtaining such a treasure!"

The astonishment with which Melicent had listened to expressions thus unexpected was at first so excessive that it was some moments before she had sufficiently recovered her presence of mind to rise from her seat, indignant that her unadvised enthusiasm should have drawn upon her a reply little less than insulting under the circumstances wherein Lindesay was placed. In silence she turned to leave the room, while he, entreating her to remain, endeavoured, in a manner which his confusion

rendered wholly unintelligible, to offer some excuse for his recent conduct Her retreat was for the time more effectually prevented by the entrance of Mr. Tresham, who came to invite her and Miss Compton to join them in their out-of-doors amusements, now that the weather was favourable enough for the purpose; and Melicent, glad of the opportunity for escape, hastened to seek for Alice, and induce her to comply with his wishes.

They were not long in reaching the banks of the water-course, along which Max and Lymington, seemingly quite oblivious of the morning's reflections, were pursuing their sport, which had proved highly successful. Alice, still principally desirous of avoiding Lindesay, and unconscious how little she was then occupying his thoughts, affected much interest in the proceedings of the sportsmen; while Tresham and Lindesay, indifferent on the subject, remained by the side of Melicent, at a short dis-

tance from the marshy ground upon whose frozen surface Miss Compton had ventured.

"Well-founded as I must confess your resentment to have been, Miss Wentworth," began Tresham, abruptly, "it appears to me too severe. Let me plead for Lindesay's forgiveness, and that you will not suffer his late behaviour materially to influence your opinion of his merits."

"What can be your meaning, Tresham?" exclaimed Lindesay, provoked by words which had painfully increased Melicent's previous embarrassment.

"These sudden paroxysms are but temporary with him, I assure you," persisted Tresham; "and after he had so unceremoniously dismissed you to your chamber last night, he was not long in recovering from his attack, and resuming a more amiable mood. Surely his eloquence exerted at such length this morning ought at least to have softened you in some degree."

"Miss Wentworth's resentment," said Lindesay, "will not, I trust, too severely follow an involuntary offence, repented of in the same moment when it was committed. She must be aware that under nothing less than irresistible influence could I have infringed the deep respect I bear her."

"And is this actually the first time you have had the grace to make the *amende honorable* for your conduct? Your penitence sounds well indeed, had it referred to a cause of offence more recent than that of last night,—but consider how unheroic a part you forced upon Miss Wentworth when you sent her to bed like a naughty little girl; a mode of proceeding to which I should imagine her wholly unaccustomed. Until this instance of harshness, I was in hopes that a longer acquaintance had entirely removed the unfavourable impression which at your first introduction Miss Wentworth was unfortunate enough to make upon you."

"Do not listen to him, Miss Wentworth; he is calumniating me. You will not believe that I ever differed from Mr. Tresham as to your merits, unless it were to express a yet deeper sense of them than his own."

"I am glad that you profess to have relinquished ideas which, as I have now known Miss Wentworth for some time, I can assure you were totally unfounded.—Still I am not altogether free from uneasiness—this entertainment at Chellingham Castle.—Every man has his weak point. Yours, my dear Lindesay, appears to be in making remarks at a ball. I advise you not to expose yourself to unnecessary danger, or if rash enough to venture thither, and you should feel one of your cynical humours coming on, that, at all events, you carefully avoid allowing Mrs. Severn to be your auditor."

"What can have tempted you to recall such folly, I cannot imagine," said Lindesay, after a pause on his part of considerable embarrassment;

"so utterly absurd, so long retracted, and altogether so unworthy to excite anything but contempt in the mind of any one who has ever seen Miss Wentworth, uninfluenced by the insanity which seems at one time to have regulated my actions not less than my opinions."

When, after the brief separation which followed their return to the house, the party were again assembled for the afternoon repast, Melicent had sufficiently shaken off her late uncomfortable sensations to be able to join as usual in the conversation, of which, however, Tresham and Maximilian were the chief promoters. Alice, not venturing to renew her flirtation with the former, was listening with an appearance of interest to his lively brother-in-law; and of all those present, Lindesay alone remained silent and abstracted, scarcely venturing to address Miss Wentworth, and seemingly regardless of most that was passing around him.

"I am glad that I can remove your uneasi-

ness, Melicent," said her cousin, later in the evening. "Our present detention is not likely to last much longer, unless prolonged by our own wishes. To-morrow we may attempt our return to Wentworth Court, although the state of the roads will still be such as to put your horsemanship and Miss Compton's to the test."

As she spoke, Max drew aside the heavy curtain from the window, to prove how well the weather seemed to promise for the meditated undertaking; and the sight of the moon rising behind the ruined chapel immediately opposite, called them all to admire the effect of her glancing beams upon the snow-covered walls and pavement of the court-yard. The desire expressed by Melicent of beholding in the full radiance now investing it, the venerable fortress itself, was participated in by all; and in a few minutes, Lucy having been called on to provide cloaks and shawls, the party had all sallied

out into the keen frosty air of the cloudless night.

Their trouble was amply repaid by the scene upon which they gazed; although, even while awarding due admiration to the grandeur of aspect assumed by the massive proportions of the ancient fabric, their steps were involuntarily directed towards that side of the court where the dark walls of the old chapel stood out in strong relief from the clear and starry sky, which showed distinctly every straggling wreath of ivy floating in the still atmosphere. Through the mouldering arches, bright rays were penetrating at intervals, in striking contrast with the deep shade enveloping the greater part of the building; while, as they advanced within its precincts, the moon, now risen higher in the heavens, poured a flood of light through the fallen roof on the pure unsullied snow, covering the broken fragments which lay scattered around.

"I really am astonished at your temerity, Miss Wentworth, in venturing within this haunted spot, after being so peculiarly favoured in the supernatural way last night," said Lymington, laughingly addressing Melicent, as they entered the chapel.

"Miss Wentworth is showing more humanity than I gave her credit for," said Tresham. "Beneath those crumbling arches, the poor demon who terrified her so unadvisedly may be submissively awaiting her forgiveness, for the sleepless night occasioned by his menacing aspect."

"Surely, you cannot suppose Miss Wentworth so foolish as to believe in ghosts, Mr. Tresham," said Alice; "I cannot imagine how sensible people can ever give the least credit to anything so very absurd!"

"I will not have any scandal against ghosts in a spot so fitted for their domain," returned Tresham; "I look upon them, indeed, as a much-

injured and meritorious race. Can you deny, fair heretic, that these hapless nonentities are generally represented by tradition as engaged in some good office? Without trespassing inconveniently upon our hospitality, during their unfrequent visits, they politely call to show some poor wretch, who has just been cut off with a shilling, or who has spent his last farthing, where he may find a treasure; or to allow us the satisfaction of affording Christian burial to the remains of our murdered relatives; and for similar kind actions they are rewarded by general odium, and by seeing fair ladies, like Miss Wentworth, turn as white as a sheet, to use the approved phrase upon such occasions. You do not share Miss Compton's incredulity?" he continued, turning to Melicent; "I think your penitent demon must have visited you in broad daylight, since you could hardly have looked more scared and amazed to Lymington by torchlight, than you appeared this morning

at an hour when it is unusual for such spirits to be allowed to leave their gloomy resting-places."

"Mr. Tresham can hardly be more sensible than I am how strange and unpardonable was my conduct last night," said Lindesay, in a low voice, addressing Melicent, while she lingered for a moment, rather apart from the rest, beside one of the old buttresses, to remark the beautiful effect of the icicles glittering among the ivy pendant from its crevices. "I can offer no excuse, however acutely I may regret the involuntary causes of displeasure which I seem doomed to give you."

Anxious to avoid any further recurrence to Colonel Lindesay's offences, Melicent moved away, but as she did so, a part of the ancient stonework beneath which she was standing suddenly gave way, and fell with a startling crash that echoed widely through the place. The voices of those who were at that moment

engaged in an animated discussion were instantly hushed upon their seeing that Melicent had been struck to the earth by the accident. She had scarcely, however, felt the shock when Lindesay, although staggered by its force, as he interposed himself between her and the falling ruin, caught her in his arms, and hurried her beyond the reach of further danger. Then perceiving that she had been partially stunned, he bore her rapidly across the court to the house, and had placed her upon the couch in the sitting-room before they were overtaken by her alarmed and anxious friends.

The injury which Melicent could not but confess to having sustained, was principally in her arm and shoulder, which had been severely bruised by one of the heavy fragments of stone, and the consequent suufferig might sufficiently account for the agitation expressed in her changing countenance, at one moment deadly pale, and the next crimsoned deeply beneath the

watchful gaze of Lindesay, who still remained by her side, endeavouring to discover some mode of alleviating her pain, and not listening to the inquiries which, after a short time, were addressed to himself, as to whether he, too, had not suffered by the accident. Not so regardless, however, did he continue, when Melicent, in hesitating accents, and averting her eyes from his, repeated the question; and his assurance that he had not received the slightest harm appeared fully borne out by the increased animation and openly expressed interest in her safety; which contrasted remarkably with the depression of his spirits during the earlier part of the evening.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Now I would give all my halls and towers,
I had that ladye within my bowers!
Now I would give my very life,
I had that ladye to my wife!"

OLD SCOTTISH BALLAD.

WHEN Melicent awoke the next morning from the restless slumber into which, overcome by fatigue and agitation, she had at length fallen, the disturbance of her mind was too great to allow her for some time to fix her thoughts upon a subject which she yet felt to require serious consideration—the line of conduct that in her present embarrassing situation she was called upon to pursue.

Among the reminiscences which in their vague and startling extravagance seemed to

form a repetition of the incoherent dreams that during the last hour had thronged her fevered brain, one idea was predominant. Colonel Lindesay loved her—of this she could not doubt—look and word too plainly spoke the fervency of the passion which he had dared to avow. Was she to blame? Melicent acquitted herself without hesitation from the charge of having intentionally supplanted Miss Compton in the affections of her future husband; and surely, her blindness till now upon such a subject was excusable. Yet even upon this head her mind was by no means at ease. Could it have been jealousy that at first induced Alice to admit Mr. Tresham's attentions, and must she accuse herself of being in any way responsible for the behaviour which had appeared so blameable?

The severe pain she was enduring increased the perplexity of Melicent's reflections, which now assumed a shape yet more harassing than

the last. What could have induced Colonel Lindesay—so strict in his ideas of female delicacy, so undeviatingly respectful in his usual demeanour, to venture upon the unpardonable step of seeking to gain her affection while his faith was pledged to another? Melicent's pale cheek flushed as she remembered Tresham's insinuations. Could Lindesay still retain the unfavourable opinion with which, it seemed, she at first inspired him?—and while he had unadvisedly permitted his heart to be enthralled, did he still, in his cooler moments, judge her character in the same harsh manner? She would convince him that on one point at least she could be firm—that she had hitherto taken pleasure in his society from the confidence and the esteem she had entertained for him, and from the idea that to her he never could be more than a friend. He had now forfeited his title to that friendship, and never should he be allowed an opportunity of repeating senti-

ments which the mere recollection of his having addressed to her in so unauthorized a manner covered her with confusion.

Her demeanour towards him should henceforth be even more freezing than Miss Compton's ;—he should see how carefully all intercourse with him was avoided by her, and should never again be flattered by the interest which she was conscious of having manifested in his conversation and pursuits. Whatever might be her state of health, an hour beyond what was absolutely necessary should not be passed at Yatton, and her earnest desire to return to Isabel was now surpassed by her uneasiness at continuing in a spot which had proved so dangerous a residence. The sight of the lonely chapel, and the footprints in the snow beneath the window, as she stood beside it, endeavouring to steady her trembling hands, and prepare for the ride home, renewed her painful sensations; yet she dreaded still more the period of

leaving her apartment, and her courage entirely failed her at the thought of meeting Lindesay's eye. Speak to him she would not, if it could possibly be avoided, and yet she felt with concern the pain her anger would inflict upon him. Banishing as well as she could the last idea, she strove to acquire the necessary composure; but her contemplations had done little to that effect, and her step was so feeble when she slowly entered the room where they were all waiting her appearance, that she was forced to be grateful for the assistance which Lindesay in silence offered, and without which she could scarcely have reached the sofa whither he conducted her.

The answers returned by Melicent to the inquiries which had already reached her through the medium of Lucy, had not prepared her friends to see her so great a sufferer; and when the faint flush that had mounted to her cheek on her entrance had subsided, all declared her

absolutely unfit to attempt the ride to Wentworth Court, and entreated her to allow them to send thither for assistance and means of better accommodation, while she remained quietly where she was for the present. So earnest, however, was Melicent in her desire to return home, and in her assurances that she was perfectly equal to the undertaking, that they gave way before the cheerfulness which she exerted herself to assume, and their departure immediately after breakfast was determined on.

To prevent the suspicion of any other cause for her agitation, Melicent did not attempt to conceal the pain her wounded arm occasioned her; and Max expostulated with her for still making any use of it, and not consenting to be considered perfectly helpless and interesting. While he spoke, Lindesay, having perceived the pain caused by the slightest movement, had procured a handkerchief, which he was already

converting into a sling in the most scientific manner.

"I have, perhaps, had more experience than any of you in broken limbs and contusions," he said; "and Miss Wentworth must believe me, when I assure her that it is absolutely indispensable for her present ease and for her ultimate recovery, that her arm, which, I fear, is more seriously injured than she would confess, should have perfect rest for some time."

He had, meanwhile, completed his task, and now, in a manner the most skilful and gentle, arranged it so as to support her arm; and she was forced to acknowledge the relief she experienced from the measure.

Upon the horses being brought round, a few minutes afterwards, Melicent requested Mr. Tresham's aid in mounting, an exertion to which she owned herself unequal without very efficient help. Supported by him she left the dwelling, and he was accordingly preparing to lift her

into her seat, when he was prevented by Lindesay's exclaiming,

"Do not attempt it, Tresham!—you are quite wrong, and Miss Wentworth will suffer torture if mounted in the way you seem to meditate. Miss Wentworth, you must allow him to resign his office to me;" and, while Melicent's confusion effectually precluded her making any reply, she felt that it was Lindesay who had raised her so carefully from the ground, and placed her on her horse, and who was arranging everything to facilitate her progress. Without for a moment relinquishing her bridle rein, he decidedly prohibited her from even attempting the guidance of her steed, of which, indeed, she was forced to admit her incapability. Tresham had retreated towards Alice;—Max and Lymington were not even looking that way; and angry with herself, yet too weak for resistance, the respectful firmness of Lindesay gained the victory, and the coveted rein remained in his possession.

Relieved by their being again joined by Mr. Tresham, Melicent endeavoured to take some part in the conversation that was carried on principally for her amusement. Her spirits gradually revived beneath the influence of the fresh bracing air; and she had almost regained her composure, when Tresham, perceiving that her cheek had, in some measure, recovered its colour, imagined probably that his presence was necessary to enliven others of the party, and suddenly reined his horse to the side of Alice.

When he had left them, there seemed some danger of Miss Wentworth's again becoming silent and embarrassed. She was provoked at being thus left alone with Lindesay, and surprised at the pertinacity with which her cousin and Lord Lymington kept aloof, as if they also considered her his peculiar charge. The momentary pause which followed was, however, quickly interrupted by her companion.

"Mr. Tresham," said Lindesay, "is a dangerous opponent, and one whose wit was little likely to lose the fair opportunity for exercise afforded by the presumption of which he yesterday accused me. I stand indeed so fully convicted of error and folly, that I can scarcely venture to offer the slight palliative of which the case will admit."

"Let me beg that you will not attempt anything so unnecessary, Colonel Lindesay," replied Melicent, coldly. "I am not aware, indeed, that Mr. Tresham charged you with any extraordinary presumption. It appeared rather to be your imprudence in selecting Mrs. Severn for your confidante to which he objected."

"In the light wherein my late confession must have placed me, I cannot complain of your yielding credit to any similar imputation of absurdity," said Lindesay. "My real accomplice, however, was not Mrs. Severn; but one who having had other opportunities of knowing

Miss Wentworth, will never be pardoned by me for not having instantly pointed out the error I was committing."

"I, at least, Colonel Lindesay, may be permitted to doubt your error having been fully proved, since it seems to have been shared in by others. The manner must certainly have been blameable which laid me open to such general misconstruction."

"The sole blame was mine, believe me," warmly returned Lindesay. "Do not ascribe to others the madness which led me, influenced by the idea that those graces which most attract us in society often unfit a woman for domestic life, and are exchanged for listlessness and indifference at home, to imagine that I should find a greater love of rational pursuits and less thirst for admiration in one whose coldness I attributed to maiden reserve, increased by the harsh rule to which she had been subjected. It remained for Miss Wentworth in her do-

mestic relations, dispensing pleasure to all around her, and forming at once the delight and solace of her friends and dependants, to convince me how blind and prejudiced I had been, and to prove to me, only too fully for my future happiness, that the powers of captivation which, on first beholding her, I had felt to be irresistible, sprang, in fact, from her possession of every quality which I most revere and admire."

"You cannot expect me to permit this, Colonel Lindesay," replied Melicent, with increased coldness and haughtiness. "There is not, I assure you, the slightest occasion for your apologies. I would far rather hear your past censures, than your present explanations."

"I know that I have deeply offended you, Miss Wentworth, and can never sufficiently lament the impetuosity which yesterday hurried me into a violation of the respect you inspired. Yet do not too utterly condemn me! I was not master of myself—I was placed in a

situation the most perplexing; and, while firmly resolved never to complete an union with one to whom I was at least an object of indifference, I feared lest my actions might be influenced by the striking contrast of character and manner which had already effectually opened my eyes to the error I had committed. It was while thus agitated that your utterance of sentiments so worthy of the opinion you had taught me to entertain of you, drew from me those expressions of admiration for yourself, and bitter regret for my past folly, which must ever excite my self-reproach, since they have merited such deep and lasting resentment."

However Melicent might feel her anger fast evaporating, the gravity of her manner still continued, and Lindesay hastened to add,—

"Will not Miss Wentworth's generosity prevent her from visiting too harshly faults thus acknowledged, and for which I have so dearly paid? When I see myself condemned either to

lead a life of misery with a woman who seems as little likely to merit confidence as to bestow affection, or to suffer imputations the most painful to a man of honour, I feel that my situation presents already too many causes of anxiety for me to be able to endure patiently your displeasure, however deservedly incurred."

"Believe me, Colonel Lindesay," said Melicent, no longer able to resist his desire for a reconciliation, "the railleries of Mr. Tresham had not made the slightest impression on me to your disadvantage. I am well satisfied to improve upon acquaintance, and only regret that I must consider myself still more undeserving of the flatteries you have been compelled to lavish on me, than I should wish to be of the censures they were intended to obliterate from my recollection. But you really must not talk to me any longer, for I feel myself, as my cousin predicted, so far unfit for the ride that it will require all my energies to enable me to

reach home, and I must refrain from farther conversation."

Her smile reassured Lindesay, whose anxiety was now solely directed towards mitigating the fatigue she experienced; and though his look and manner sufficiently betrayed the feelings by which he was actuated, he carefully refrained during the rest of the way from breaking the silence imposed upon him, except by the suggestions he was occasionally enabled to make for the relief of her suffering.

An universal dismay was spread through Wentworth Court by the knowledge of the accident which had befallen its fair young mistress; and every one, not excepting Mr. Compton and Dora, shared in the alarm and concern of Sir Arthur and her sister, upon seeing Melicent return thus disabled. It was fortunate for her that Mr. Tresham came to her assistance to reply to the anxious inquiries made respecting

the cause of the accident; and it was a still greater relief to comply with her uncle's injunctions, and retire with Mrs. Tresham and Isabel to rest after her imprudent exertions. Even their affectionate interrogatories were more than Melicent could bear; and perceiving the extreme nervous agitation to which she was by no means subject on ordinary occasions, her kind nurses at length agreed to leave her for some time in perfect quiet, to recover from the exhaustion produced by her late over-excitement.

Melicent was a general favourite; and the diminution of the cheerfulness usually prevalent at Sir Arthur's board, from the want of her presence, was sensibly felt by the guests he had invited for this day. But whatever might be their private feelings, none of the party expressed themselves so eloquently as the Earl of Chellingham, who seemed to consider that the announcement of the regrets of all present devolved upon himself, and who accordingly deli-

vered on the subject one of his most elaborate harangues, addressing himself to Isabel, to whom, as her sister's deputy, his attentions during dinner were chiefly paid.

Little account of their adventure was to be extracted from Miss Compton, who was apparently under the influence of a most severe attack of sullenness, probably occasioned by the strict surveillance of her father, who seemed aware that no increase of cordiality had taken place between herself and Lindesay during their absence. This truly English reserve and propriety of demeanour, as he considered it, excited especial admiration in Monsieur de Fontanges, who was visibly delighted with a manner so opposed to the foreign ease and gaiety to which he was accustomed. The party from Oaklands consisted, besides himself, of Mr. and Mrs. Severn, the interesting invalid and her brother,—Miss Severn having probably waived her claims of seniority out of regard for the

ultimate advantage of the family; and Mrs. Severn's maternal anxiety was gratified by seeing her poor Maria, who was quite unequal to much excitement, take her old place beside her kind and considerate friend Mr. Wentworth,—he was so very particular a favourite with her, and indeed with all the family,—Mr. Severn always saying he did not anywhere know a young man to equal him. In this whispered opinion of the merits of his nephew, Sir Arthur fully agreed, and began really to think better than he had done of Mrs. Severn, who, after all, had very sensible ideas upon some subjects.

Melicent's earnest desire to allay the fears of her uncle, and the tranquillising effect of her partial explanation with Colonel Lindesay, combined, with Mr. Tatnall's judicious treatment, to enable her to descend in the evening for a few hours to the sofa in the drawing-room, which certainly afforded a more luxurious resting-place

than the antique couches at Yatton Manor ; and although still pale and nervous, she was able to bear with tolerable equanimity the various inquiries of her friends, and to master the confusion which the bare mention of their late sojourn there always occasioned. Lindesay, after standing for a few moments aloof, angry with them all for crowding round her, and tormenting her with questions which she appeared scarcely equal to answering, gradually found himself also irresistibly attracted to trangress in the same manner ; and it almost seemed as if his silent approach had done more towards Melicent's discomposure than the interrogatories of the whole party.

" And you really have been imprisoned all this time in that romantic old Manor House ?" said Mrs. Severn, who had stationed herself beside Melicent. " The place that you, Mr. Wentworth, used to describe to us so beautifully ! Maria will now be more anxious than

ever to explore its haunted galleries and mysterious chambers. Anything antique quite turns her head, Miss Wentworth! Old houses—old families. She used to say when we were in Italy, that she valued one of the venerable customs of our old English families more than all the interesting relics of Herculaneum and Pompeii!"

"Miss Maria Severn would find her taste for English antiquities well rewarded if you would allow her to visit Sir Arthur's old farm," said Lymington. "Its advantages would be all thrown away, however, unless you had Wentworth to point them out. He is an inimitable *cicerone;* and his admirable legends and ghost stories impart additional attractions to the venerable fabric."

"Oh, we know he would be quite in his element! But all these inducements, Lord Lymington, only teach me that a visit to Yatton is a forbidden pleasure. I cannot venture to

indulge Maria's fancy for old ruins ;—she is only too romantic, too enthusiastic for me to trust her in such interesting localities. Before you went abroad, Mr. Wentworth, we used often, if you remember, to plan excursions to Yatton. Then my poor girl was stronger; but now the least excitement to her too susceptible feelings must be most carefully avoided."

"You will be able at all events to profit by our experience, Mrs. Severn," said Melicent, "and delay your excursion to Yatton until less dangerous weather."

"Do not take such interested counsel, Mrs. Severn," said Tresham; "Miss Wentworth is unwilling to resign the glory of having been, with the exception of Miss Compton, the sole heroine of the season, and may also be afraid that Miss Severn's long residence abroad may have rendered her a yet more skilful artist than herself. Were she candid, she would confess what admirable designs may even now with

perfect convenience be taken from the windows. That unlucky accident may most allowably have confused your reminiscences on the subject, Miss Wentworth; but could you not show Mrs. Severn the delineation of that curious old chapel, which you have hitherto so carefully concealed from us all?"

Melicent, effectually silenced, offered no farther remark, and Lymington went on, addressing Mrs. Severn:

"This really appears an opportunity for the excursion not to be lost, and were I you, Mrs. Severn, I should insist upon Wentworth's being in attendance to-morrow or next day at farthest. The weather may otherwise break up, and we can all bear witness to the bewitching effect of moonlight upon newly-fallen snow. Wentworth is an excellent purveyor, and must now understand all the ways of the place. I assure you, that you will find an enforced detention like ours by no means disagreeable."

With a trifling diminution of her accustomed suavity as she began to suspect his meaning, Mrs. Severn replied,

"I must venture to differ from Lord Lymington and Mr. Tresham, in thinking the summer a season better adapted for these excursions. I am of a more prudent age than our fair hostess, and must avoid the least danger of a similar detention for my girls, however the novelty of the occurrence may have rendered it delightful to your agreeable party. Indeed young ladies are usually so strictly guarded, so carefully chaperoned in our unromantic days, that it seems almost impossible that such an accident should befal them."

"So much the better!" growled Mr. Compton; "it ought never to be allowed to happen! Who ever heard of sensible people going in the snow to look at old ruins? Had *I* been at Wentworth Court that morning, Miss Compton at least should not have made one of such a party, with no better escort than four or five

young men, none of them famed, as far as I ever heard, for particular discretion and gravity. You, my worthy friend, seem to have strangely departed, on this occasion, from your usual prudence," he added, turning to Sir Arthur, who, with Lord Chellingham, had recently joined the group.

"I am never a very vigilant guardian," replied Sir Arthur; "and am therefore the more fortunate in possessing nieces, whom I can consider as fully competent to direct their own conduct in such particulars."

"Far be it from me, my good sir, to interfere with your domestic arrangements, however I may question their sagacity. This detention appears also to have been compulsory, and therefore we will waive the subject, which must undoubtedly appear of a most trivial nature to the mothers and daughters of the present enlightened age! I do *not* entirely agree with the modern notion of teaching young Englishwomen to con-

sider it matter for boasting, that they have been paraded amongst the most dissipated continental circles, listening to the flatteries of foreign fools, all eager to rebuild their ruined *chateaux* with a good comfortable English fortune!"

"But reflect, my dear sir," observed Mrs. Severn, "upon the disadvantages of a circumscribed education in these days of refinement. So much is now required to make a young lady presentable in the best circles! and nothing surely tends more to enlarge the mind, and provide resources against the tedium of domestic life in after years, than the having in youth acquired an extended knowledge of other countries, their arts and accomplishments!"

"I must request leave to differ from you, madam; I am far from thinking a woman better calculated for an English matron, from having spent half her life in the society of chattering Frenchmen; nor do I consider it indispensable for her future happiness, that she should have

taken a single sketch of the interesting relics of Pompeii and Herculaneum."

Sir Arthur, annoyed at the turn the conversation had taken, and fearing lest Mr. Compton's uncourteous remarks might reach the ear of Monsieur de Fontanges, for which they were evidently intended, now hastened to address Melicent and Mr. Tresham.

"I cannot imagine how you could contrive to make yourselves so comfortable at Yatton. When I was there, the place was in a most deplorable condition; yet I have not heard any of you make a single complaint upon the subject."

"Do not ask Miss Wentworth's opinion as to the state of Yatton Farm," said Tresham, laughing. "We who see her so entirely in her own sphere," he added, turning to Lord Chellingham, "can scarcely believe the saddening effect produced upon her mind by the spectacle of those desolate chambers. Lindesay and myself

fortunately had profited enough by our wandering lives, to be able to give a cheerful air to the scene, by the judicious contrivances which had before been found serviceable for the amelioration of other deplorable quarters. I shall not easily forget your face of despair, Miss Wentworth, when you reclined in ladylike inactivity upon that antique couch, looking in vain for the obsequious train of menials wont in happier times to obey your gentle mandates; or your relief upon perceiving the miraculous effect of our useful exertions."

While Melicent, however amused by Tresham's account, was about to betray its want of truth, the Earl, upon whom Tresham's kind offices in behalf of Miss Wentworth had produced the effect he anticipated, observed, courteously addressing himself to her,

"It could scarcely be deemed necessary or advisable, that our fair and gentle hostess should excel in avocations and employments, unbe-

coming and derogatory to the station she is called on to sustain; or relinquish her elegant and refined pursuits, to attend to minutiæ and particulars, which in their exhibition may be highly proper and commendable in those upon whom they devolve in the due course of things. While we behold with gratitude and pleasure, the lovely and dignified members of our feminine aristocracy, superintending and presiding in their ancestral halls, over the higher branches of their domestic and social duties, we would have them resign to less delicate and cultivated tastes, those notable and industrious cares which were in former times more allowably classed among their sex's excellencies and perfections!"

So overpowering in its effect upon the mind of the Earl, was the consternation with which he received, on rising to take leave, Sir Arthur's polite excuses for the impossibility of Miss Wentworth's appearance at Chellingham

Castle on the morrow, that, wholly deprived of his accustomed eloquence, he left the room, merely expressing in the most simple, though earnest language, his regret upon the occasion.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"The damsel is so changed, my lord, that folks say there is witchery in the matter; and some are wise enough, an' you will listen to them, to name you the hour and who did the mischief."

THE DOUBLE TRIAL.

"Do you not think that Melicent has suffered more than she is willing to confess from this unfortunate accident?" said Isabel, with an expression of considerable anxiety, to Mrs. Tresham, as they sat at work in the saloon, before Melicent had made her appearance the next morning. "I never saw any one so much altered in my life; she has not been used to be nervous; and now the least thing makes her

start, and change colour—her spirits are unequal, and altogether I am quite unhappy about her."

Mrs. Tresham smiled, as she replied in her usual gentle tone, "I cannot say that I perceive the slightest occasion for alarm, my dear; Melicent is not in good spirits, certainly; but I have no doubt she will very soon get over her present uncomfortable sensations, and she will enjoy the return of her former health and cheerfulness the more after this temporary dejection."

A little surprised at the coolness of Mrs. Tresham's manner, Isabel warmly replied,

"I do not see that Melicent requires any lesson of the kind, since her disposition is more cheerful, and her temper more even, than those of any other person I ever met with. I am convinced that there is some deeper cause than we suppose for her present low spirits, and shall certainly do all in my power to discover and remove it as soon as possible."

"Do not trouble yourself, my dear; all will go on rightly without our interference; and you will own, that Melicent will, in the end, be the happier for the slight trials she is now undergoing."

Isabel continued her work in silence, somewhat wounded by Mrs. Tresham's want of sympathy for her sisterly anxieties, and wondering whether she had forgotten all her professions of gratitude in former times, for Melicent's kindness and consideration. Her anger was nevertheless abated by the tenderness with which, on Melicent's entering the room a few moments afterwards, Mrs. Tresham assisted her in placing cushions and shawls for the accommodation of her sister, about whose sofa they were still busied, when Tresham and Max came into the apartment.

"I may flatter myself that I have performed at least one kind action in my life," said the former; "since I was assuredly the happy cause

of dispelling the clouds which Mrs. Severn's insinuations, and Mr. Compton's strictures touching our late expedition, had collected on the brow of Lord Chellingham. Had I not represented you in the interesting light so becoming to a future member of our feminine aristocracy, I doubt whether his Lordship would not have allowed the County families to break their necks, without troubling himself to postpone his meditated festival."

While speaking, Tresham delivered to Miss Wentworth the mission which Sir Arthur had intrusted to his charge; wherein the Earl intimated with due formality, that owing to the dangerous state of the roads, and other circumstances, the entertainment at Chellingham Castle would not take place till the beginning of the following week.

"Your manœuvres, Tresham, were almost frustrated by Melicent's imprudence," said Max. "Had not Lord Chellingham's pompous oration

effectually prevented her making herself heard, she certainly meditated contradicting your friendly statements."

"After hearing all Mrs. Severn's and Mr. Compton's objections," remarked Mrs. Tresham, "I suppose the less said about your excursion, except confidentially, the better; though really since you, Melicent, had your cousin to take care of you, and above all, Tresham, a married man, being there to keep up propriety, I do not think there was much harm in the thing altogether. I am afraid, though, you must have been very much tired of each other, shut up in that dismal old place. Miss Compton and Kenneth were, I conclude, obliged to become sentimental at last. You, Mr. Wentworth, showed the curiosities of Yatton to your cousin, instead of describing them so beautifully to Miss Maria. Frank talked nonsense to your pretty handmaiden; but I quite pity you, Tresham!—How could you amuse yourself all day?"

"I assure you I did not find things in the least dull," said Tresham, laughing; "there were many recreations at hand. Miss Wentworth certainly was too much engaged in sketching, and too much frightened at the ghosts, to talk much in a general way;—but I can always find something to do in the most unpromising situations, and seldom passed my time more pleasantly than during our short stay at Yatton."

While Melicent silently wished she had Tresham's assurance to enable her to take things quietly, Mrs. Tresham proceeded.

"Like a good wife I asked Kenneth what it was you had found to do with yourself, but really his accouut of your diversions was so imperfect and dispiriting, that I could not believe that to be all you had to amuse you. You shot snipes and fieldfares, which must have been rather stupid,—and all my labour could not elicit that you had any other occupation while you remained there."

"Depend upon it, we were not so stupid as you imagine; ask Miss Compton, and she will tell you that she liked it of all things—but do not take Miss Wentworth's opinion, since I am afraid, notwithstanding her laudable industry, she found the time hang heavily on her hands, and of course her unfortunate accident must have made her hate the very name of the place. Am I right, Miss Wentworth?"

As Melicent concluded the hesitating reply, which again alarmed Isabel as to the state of her nerves, Max observed,

"The fair Alice seems to have resumed the unamiable mood which she laid aside at Yatton. There she was really quite good-humoured and accommodating, but now she is more sullen than I ever before saw her."

"Monsieur de Fontanges admires her sulkiness particularly," said Mrs. Tresham. "He

was praising her all yesterday evening, as the only English young lady who had completely attained to the idea he had formed before visiting this country of the dignity and reserve of its females. It was rather amusing to hear her father's invectives against fortune-hunters, just when the Vicomte had in the most delicate manner been learning every particular that his cautious inquiries could draw from me respecting Miss Compton's expectations, and the number of her brothers and sisters. I wish he would marry her, it would annoy her father so much, and then Kenneth could find a wife more worthy of him."

The entrance of Dora at this moment, served to divert attention from the visible discomposure which was increased in Melicent by that young lady's exclaiming, in her usual abrupt way,—

"I am come here because I mayn't stop in our sitting-room. Alice and Colonel Lindesay

have been having a regular talking together for the last half-hour, and he sent me away when he first went in."

"During the interval I conclude you have been deriving amusement from your ordinary resource of listening at the door," remarked Max. "You are in the habit, if I mistake not, of finding your sister's *tête-à-têtes* particularly edifying."

"You don't suppose I would take the trouble of listening to what she and Colonel Lindesay have got to say to each other! I'll answer for its being something plaguily stupid. No! I like of all things hearing you talk to Alice," she continued, turning to Tresham, to the great amusement of the party;—"that's glorious fun! because you talk such nonsense, and she is so foolish: but you won't catch me listening for half an hour to her and Colonel Lindesay prosing away together."

Upon the appearance of Lindesay, not long

after Dora had thus accounted for his absence, his manner seemed to have lost much of the embarrassment which had characterized it during the last day or two. He approached Melicent with marked solicitude in the inquiries he addressed to her, and even ventured to draw a seat near the head of her couch, round which her friends had collected.

"What a pity it is that I did not meet with this accident instead of Melicent!" said Mrs. Tresham. "Perhaps, indeed, I should not have borne the pain quite so patiently, but then an invalid ought to give trouble; and I should like particularly to lie on a sofa all day, and have people to wait upon me, while she will be tired of it in a very short time."

"We all owe so much in general to Miss Wentworth's exertions, that we are bound to do our utmost to prevent her wearying of her present imprisonment," said Lindesay. "Let her fancy herself a sultana, and call upon her

slaves to employ all their various talents and capabilities for the enlivenment of the tedious hours. Let her appoint one of us to execute all her mandates, another to arrange her cushions, and divide among the rest the pleasing duties of disposing her to slumber by the exercise of their powers of conversation, minstrelsy, or story-telling."

"Something may possibly be done in this way for her," said Mrs. Tresham; "but she does not understand the thing, and I despair of seeing her comfortable. Even now, instead of enjoying her privileges of indolence, she must be employing her fingers, when I should be so much delighted at being conscientiously able to consider myself incapable of doing anything. She will hurt her arm, will she not, Kenneth, by that nonsensical work?"

"Not if she suffers it to be properly supported," he replied, as he arranged Melicent's cushions in such a manner as to prevent the

necessity of her arm being moved whilst her taper fingers plied their task.

"Where did you learn to be such an admirable nurse, Lindesay?" said Tresham, looking up from a letter with which he had appeared fully occupied. "Laura, you must give me some lessons. I hate doing anything awkwardly, and am sensible of being completely eclipsed in that line by Lindesay, whom I never should have suspected of being so great a proficient in it."

"You have not had so much experience as Colonel Lindesay in scenes of difficulty and distress," said Melicent, striving to be composed, and not to blush. "Soldiers and sailors are always said to make excellent nurses, probably from their being often forced to rely upon each other's kind offices when disabled and helpless."

"You will then allow me that post in your household," said Lindesay, with unusual anima-

tion. "It is one, however, you must recollect, of considerable authority; and I shall enter upon it by requiring you now to be kept quiet, and prevented from farther fatiguing yourself by conversation."

Melicent gratefully allowed him to silence her kind friends, and provide her with a book, glad to escape under the plea of weakness from any recurrence of the embarrassing gaiety from which she had suffered so much during the morning.

Her surprise was aroused as the day wore on, by remarking the amicable terms on which Miss Compton and Colonel Lindesay seemed to stand with regard to each other, after their long interview of the morning. Alice had then justified herself in his eyes, and Melicent need no longer reproach herself with having been the cause of breaking off their marriage. However desirable this relief from blame might appear, the satisfaction it afforded was by no means unmingled,

since under such circumstances Colonel Lindesay's present manner towards herself became inexplicable. While the respectful and quiet nature of his attentions rendered their rejection impracticable, it was impossible for her, enlightened as she had been, not to read in his countenance and in the inflexion of his voice when he addressed her, the same unaltered feelings which had governed his late passionate avowal; and while his demeanour towards his betrothed appeared considerably more courteous and friendly than had lately been the case, Melicent was conscious that she herself remained the object of his constant observance, even when he was apparently engaged in conversation with others, and that the occurrence of the slightest occasion for assisting her was certain to bring him instantly to her side. Harassed and perplexed, Melicent retired early to her chamber; but the same uneasiness accompanied her thither, and appeared to be justified by the same causes

during the whole of the following day. A change of thought was in some degree afforded by the arrival of Mr. Walsingham, and the consequent recurrence of her mind to her sister's affairs; but these could no longer occupy her undivided attention, and even the reflection that her present embarrassments would probably cease with the now approaching period of the departure of Mr. Compton's family, failed to yield the gratification that might naturally have been expected.

## CHAPTER IX.

"Why, what's the matter,
That you wear such a February face,
So full of frost and storm, and cloudiness?"
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

A DAY comparatively free from any new vexations and annoyances had done much, if not towards tranquillizing the mind of Melicent, at least towards the restoration of her bodily health, and she was lying quietly on her couch with her uncle sitting beside her, when Mrs. Compton entered the room.

"You have not so many kind friends as

usual about you this morning, Miss Wentworth. A little sober conversation between Sir Arthur and myself, is, in my opinion, much better for you than the excitement of listening to the livelier discourse of the younger members of our party—who seem indeed more dispersed than usual this morning. Some of the gentlemen are, I believe, in the billiard-room, and Colonel Lindesay has accompanied Alice to call on my brother and sister at Danesfield."

"Was not Miss Compton imprudent in venturing out on horseback to-day? The weather looks unpromising, and her late expedition ought to have taught her caution," said Sir Arthur.

"Oh! if Alice thinks it right to do anything she would not be deterred from the performance by the risk of any trifling inconvenience to herself. I am always an advocate for keeping up family ties; and on my dear girl's account,

I feel the utmost gratitude for your kindness in enabling us to see so much lately of Mr. and Mrs. Tresham. Miss Wentworth will enter into my feelings of the extremely painful situation in which a female is placed on entering a perfectly new set of connexions, and of the importance of some previous degree of intimacy with them being established for her. Really my heart fails me when I think of my dear girl's distant and stranger home. To me its splendours are neutralised by the thought how widely I shall be severed from my Alice."

"You must not allow your mind to dwell upon that side of the picture," said the good Baronet, cheerfully; "Consider, my dear Madam, how singularly fortunate is Miss Compton's destiny—how seldom parents can submit to this inevitable separation with similar confidence in the future happiness of their children."

"I do indeed feel grateful for the blessing of such prospects to one so fully deserving of them

as my daughter; but still you must forgive me for sometimes being unable to console myself for her loss, even by the consideration that her future guardian is everything that Mr. Compton and myself could desire. Colonel Lindesay is really a person every way so superior!—so perfectly the gentleman in everything—always acting with such good taste and propriety! This morning, however, I have been sadly overcome. I know it is very weak—but you, Miss Wentworth, will understand my womanly feelings."

"I hope that nothing of a distressing nature has befallen any of your family?" inquired Melicent.

"Oh no! far from it; and I suppose I ought to rejoice at what will give the young people so much pleasure. But I will confess my weakness—I had always counted upon retaining Alice with me until she should be of age; and this morning her father told me that on our

return to Compton Lodge he meant to make arrangements to allow Colonel Lindesay to claim his bride in the early part of the spring."

All doubt was by these words removed from Melicent's mind. Colonel Lindesay, far from breaking off his marriage, was, it seems, impatient for its conclusion. The astonishment occasioned by this intimation scarcely allowed her to lend the proper attention when Mrs. Compton, turning towards her, proceeded,—

"You will now understand why I cannot just at this moment sufficiently appreciate all the advantages which an union with such a man as the Colonel holds forth to Alice. But I must not, as Sir Arthur says, think about these things! I could scarcely expect that Alice would long be left to me;—and, since part we must, the conduct of her lover in every particular fully justifies the prudence and discretion of her choice."

"I must say that I perfectly agree with Mr. Compton," observed Sir Arthur, "in condemning long engagements when the alliance is in all respects so unobjectionable. It is a painful suspense for the young people, and depend upon it, my dear Madam, you would feel as much reluctance in parting with your daughter a year hence as you do at this moment."

"Men are always expecting us to be thus reasonable," said Mrs. Compton, as Sir Arthur withdrew. "Even your uncle, good and kind as he is, condemns my weakness, and cannot understand that while we acknowledge them to be right and acting for the best, our rebel feelings will sometimes gain the mastery. But he too will be taught, when you have both of you contracted other ties, that the married woman has too many precious duties and nearer interests to be again what she once was to the guardians of her youth. Can I expect that

Alice, engrossed as she will be in all the arrangements of her splendid household, in conforming herself to her husband's tastes and to the new modes of life she will have henceforth to lead, will think of me in the same manner at Strathmorven, as when I alone provided for her happiness and comfort? But I see you too are beginning to think me unpardonably selfish, for not rejoicing that in her affectionate husband Alice will find a yet dearer and more efficient protector than even her mother has hitherto proved to her; and that in the happier sphere of wedded life—in such an union as that which she is now on the point of concluding, my dearest child will be enabled to display those high virtues and attainments with which it has been my pride and my duty to store her youthful mind!"

At this moment the angry tones of Mr. Compton's voice summoning his wife, obliged her hastily to relinquish her office of enlivening

Melicent's solitude; and desiring Dora, who had been sitting at the other end of the room, to wait upon and amuse Miss Wentworth, Mrs. Compton left Melicent to her own reflections, and the soothing attentions of the mischievous Dora. They did not long, however, remain alone together, Colonel Lindesay having returned from his expedition with his betrothed to Danesfield, entering the saloon a short time afterwards.

"Are none of your slaves in attendance excepting Dora?" he said, advancing towards Melicent, and assuming the place by her side which Mrs. Compton had occupied. "You have no books, no work within your reach, and I know that you dislike being idle."

"Do not trouble yourself, Colonel Lindesay," answered Melicent, coldly. "If I wish for anything, Dora can bring it to me without obliging you to exert yourself so unnecessarily."

Surprised at her unusual abruptness, Linde-

say desisted from his efforts for her accommodation, and endeavoured to amuse her with an account of the proceedings at Danesfield, and other topics; her disinclination to maintain a conversation being evident, he then offered to read to her, but in a manner still more decided, Melicent rejected the proposal—she had a severe head-ache, and felt quite unequal either to reading or conversation.

"You're in for it now!" exclaimed Dora, as his countenance betrayed surprise and mortification at Miss Wentworth's unwonted rudeness. "She's as huffy as can be this morning, and has looked as if she could bite my head off for ever so long. I used to say she was the only person in the house, except Max, who never scolded me; but to-day she's worse than any of them, and if you take my advice, you'll peg off, for ever since Mamma and Sir Arthur were here palavering about Alice's wedding, she's been as sulky as ever the governor was—just

because, I suppose, she's afraid she'll never get any one to marry her, and hates the thought of being an old maid, of course!"

Any attempt to describe the sensations with which Melicent had listened to Dora's harangue, would be useless. Utterly confounded, she felt almost deprived of the power of reflection, and remained perfectly unconscious of the effect it might have produced upon Lindesay; and although his voice, when a moment afterwards he broke the silence with some careless remark, as if he had scarcely attended to Dora, in some slight degree reassured her, yet the only material relief she could receive seemed afforded by his almost directly leaving the room. Whether Dora obtained an increase of favour after her indiscreet animadversions is doubtful; but certainly Melicent remained for a considerable time silent and embarrassed, and attended little to Mrs. Tresham when she replaced Dora as her attendant and companion.

Her painful confusion on again beholding Lindesay subsided, as the day wore on, beneath the influence of his quiet unaltered demeanour. Could he not have heard, or at all events not thought of, Dora's absurdities? The hope was at least worth encouraging; and Melicent revolved it in her mind till almost convinced of its being well founded, as she lay with a book in her hand, that Mrs. Tresham might not think it necessary to talk for her amusement. Her meditations were interrupted by the arrival of a messenger from Chellingham Castle, bearing its noble owner's written enquiries respecting the health of Miss Wentworth. These were couched in the most elaborate phrase; and while Mrs. Tresham, to save her friend unnecessary trouble, was briefly replying to the pompous effusion, Colonel Lindesay returned to the room, where, fortified by her late reflections, Melicent was now able to bear his approach with tolerable equanimity. This was quickly,

however, in danger of deserting her; when Mrs. Tresham, rising from her seat, desired her brother to seal and direct Miss Wentworth's note, as she was herself obliged to hasten to dress for dinner; and, in another moment, Melicent found herself alone with Lindesay, who had willingly undertaken the task assigned to him.

"To what fair friend of Miss Wentworth's is this delicate little epistle to be addressed?" he enquired. "I fear my calligraphy will sadly disgrace its minute and ladylike proportions."

"My fair correspondent," replied Melicent, smiling, "is Lord Chellingham, who has kindly written to inquire after my health; and, really, his production is so eloquent that it well deserves any excellencies in return which Mrs. Tresham may have expended in her reply."

On Melicent's mentioning the name of the Earl, Lindesay immediately desisted from his employment of folding her note.

"And am I considered the most fitting secre-

tary upon this occasion? My sister may be forgiven for her injudicious selection; but why you should think it an agreeable office for me to aid and abet your communications with your pompous suitor, certainly passes my comprehension!"

"Do not trouble yourself, Colonel Lindesay," coldly replied Melicent, much provoked by his manner. "I am perfectly equal to performing myself the task which you appear to find so disagreeable."

"Before this moment I could scarcely have imagined that my services could be desired by you in any way wherein I should hesitate to assist you. This, however, is an extreme case! Henceforward, these interesting communications must pass through other hands; and as for the one you have so incautiously committed to my charge,—concluding me, I suppose, free from the ordinary weaknesses of man's nature,—I think I may find for it a more suitable destiny

than that of lending encouragement to the noble Earl's devotion."

As Lindesay spoke, he quietly consigned the note he held to the flames; and Melicent, irritated yet confused, remained for a moment watching its destruction. Then, haughtily rising, she approached the table, and prepared to indite another reply to his Lordship's inquiries.

"Do not make me reproach myself with having caused you so much exertion. Surely a verbal answer will satisfy the Earl's uneasiness, since I am by no means barbarous enough to wish the poor gentleman to remain in his present suspense. You must forgive my involuntary anger against that innocent note, or rather, the part which you had assigned to me; and permit your cousin, or any other person in the house, to prevent your doing his Lordship the honour of such unwise exertion on his account."

Melicent vouchsafed him no reply; but on the entrance of Mr. Wentworth, willingly con-

signed to him a task for which her trepidation wholly unfitted her. She succeeded in preserving her stately dignity as long as she remained in Lindesay's sight; but after her retreat from the saloon had been effected, she could no longer refrain from giving way to the sensations of shame and mortification which so many circumstances had tended to excite. The unpardonable presumption, the confident air of Lindesay, awoke her liveliest resentment. Never would she forgive that odious child for having been the means of placing her in such a situation. Was it strange that Lindesay's pride should be flattered by hearing that the discussion of his projected marriage had been able to alter her temper, to render her gloomy and thoughtful, rude to himself and unjust to others? Melicent felt humbled to the dust—yet could it be true? And was it the thought that Lindesay had been so fully reconciled with Miss Compton that had made her so discontented and so angry with him?

She tried in vain to banish an idea which she could not answer satisfactorily. It was of little import;—he, at all events, believed it—had acted upon the impression that he had the power to influence her actions—had dared thus openly and freely to allude to his own sentiments. She could not be blind to the alteration wrought in a few hours in his look and manner;—and this encouragement had been given at the very moment when he knew her to have been listening to his matrimonial arrangements!

He should not long, however, retain so flattering an impression;—his conduct had justified her utmost indignation; and while she felt too keenly that in his presence her embarrassment would prevent her from treating him with the calm indifference which would have been his wisest and most proper punishment, she resolved to adopt the only remaining course of showing by every means in her power her avoidance and

dislike of his society. She longed to continue alone for the rest of the day;—to decline the entertainment at Chellingham Castle, where she dreaded his persisting in paying her attentions which she shrank from accepting. But how would the presumptuous Lindesay intrepret her proceeding? Would he not exult still more in the belief of his influence upon her feelings?—perhaps think that she consulted his wishes in avoiding Lord Chellingham's assiduities.

Summoning all her pride to her assistance, and nerved yet more upon again seeing Lindesay by the recollection of his recent arrogance, Melicent fully succeeded in imparting an air the most cold and haughty to her demeanour; and carefully avoiding to bestow either a word or look upon him, she maintained, by a violent effort over herself, a tolerable degree of composure throughout the whole of the evening.

## CHAPTER X.

" Oft have I mused what purpose bad
That foul malicious urchin had
To bring this meeting round."
LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL.

" IF you had any goodnature, Dora, you would keep quiet, when you know what a headache I have, and how much worse that noise makes it."

Alice had retreated to her own room after dinner, and the languid tones in which she spoke had more effect than usual upon her volatile companion.

"How should I know your head ached?" she answered, not very graciously, but pausing in her diversion of chasing her squirrel round the room. "To be sure, you have been looking dull and cross enough all day; but I thought that was because you wanted Mr. Tresham to talk to you, and Papa was looking out so sharp that you couldn't get him near you."

"Really, Dora, you have most extraordinary ideas!" exclaimed Alice, indignantly. "It is certainly enough to make one cross and out of spirits to be watched as I am by my father, owing to your ridiculous stories. I wonder what he thinks likely to happen, if he trusts me out of his sight for a moment!"

"I don't know what he thinks, but I know very well what it is you want; and, if I pleased, I could manage it for you, too, in spite of the governor and his wisdom!"

Dora's influence was well known, and with an object in view, the amiable sister became

affectionate immediately. Her promises and bribes, and yet more, the desire of showing her own superiority in the art of manœuvring, easily induced Dora to lend her assistance; and Mr. Compton, accordingly, went through his accustomed number of rubbers at whist that evening, under the pleasing conviction, founded on the assurances of his favourite, that Alice was in the music-room in conference with Colonel Lindesay.

"I do not think you deserve that I should take any notice of you, Mr. Tresham!" said Alice, as seeing her busied at the music-desk, he approached to offer his assistance. "You have scarcely spoken to me these three days."

"And did you, fair hypocrite, waste one thought upon me amidst the numerous claimants for your smiles? Has not Monsieur de Fontanges, yesterday and this morning, occupied your attention? Shame upon you, Miss Comp-

ton,—you are the most finished coquette in a quiet way that I ever had the good fortune to meet with!"

"Fancy your calling me a coquette, Mr. Tresham! How surprised any one would be to hear you say so! But I know you do not believe that I like talking to Monsieur de Fontanges half so well as to you, though you pretend to do so as an excuse for not having come near me lately."

"Was it not in obedience to your commands that I refrained from approaching you? Lindesay certainly looked unconcerned enough when he walked out of the room just now, which was by no means flattering to my vanity. Of all things in the world, I detest being considered harmless!"

"Oh! you have done quite mischief enough to satisfy any one; and since it is owing to you that I am anxious and unhappy to-night, you ought not to talk nonsense, and quiz me."

The room had by this time been gradually deserted by the others, and Tresham, struck by her altered manner and evident dejection, said kindly and earnestly,

"Forgive me if I have for a moment offended you by ill-timed raillery! Tell me, I entreat you, the cause of your uneasiness, and most gladly will I do all in my power to remove it."

"You can do nothing, Mr. Tresham, but make things worse, since my father will already regard you as the cause of my marriage with Colonel Lindesay being broken off. I cannot tell you how much I dread his anger when he discovers such to be the case; and although at my request, Colonel Lindesay has consented to conceal it for the present, yet, when we leave this neighbourhood, all must undoubtedly be made known."

"I am indeed concerned, Miss Compton, to hear of your being exposed to so much inquietude. Let me trust that your difficulties will

prove less than you anticipate. Lindesay will, I am convinced, do all in his power to prevent your father's displeasure from falling upon you; and you have, at all events, escaped the far greater evil of what you are fully aware to have been an ill-assorted union."

"I have no wish, believe me, Mr. Tresham, to avoid my father's violence by retracting the avowal I did not hesitate to make to Colonel Lindesay that I could not love him. The knowledge that I had warmer feelings to bestow;—that more than a splendid establishment is necessary for happiness, is, however, a lesson which I am likely long to regret having been taught."

Tresham started, and looked earnestly at his companion, whose countenance was covered with the deepest blushes. "Miss Compton," he gravely said, "may rest assured that among all her friends she can scarcely find one more interested in her welfare than myself. I am

bound to assist you with my services as far as they can avail, since the opinion you say your father will entertain, renders me in some measure accountable for your present uneasiness. Could I indeed reproach myself with having occasioned you pain, deep would be my remorse;—but such cannot be the case;—even now, the consciousness that you are freed from the danger of fettering yourself by ties distasteful, yet permanently binding, repays your present apprehensions;—and there can be little doubt that the feelings which have revolted from an union with a man who had not won your affection, must ensure your felicity with him whom you may hereafter honour by your choice."

Before Alice had recovered from the surprise into which she had been thrown by Tresham's grave exordium, she found herself conducted by him to the room whither those who had at first been their companions had some time since

adjourned. With so many existing causes of restraint and uneasiness among its members, it was impossible that the cheerfulness usually characteristic of the circle at Wentworth Court should have been apparent on this the last evening of the visit of the Compton family; and, on the countenances of many of the party, the expression of gloom and dejection was singularly in contrast with Mr. Compton's declaration, as he triumphantly concluded his final rubber, that he had not felt in such a humour for enjoying himself since he left Compton Lodge.

"Positively one grows much attached to a place when one purposes leaving it next morning!" he remarked, on entering the apartment where Isabel was gaily talking to Walsingham, and waiting till she could resume her harp without danger of irritating Mr. Compton by distracting the attention of the card-players. "This has really been an agreeable evening! Mr. Walsingham, I am happy to see *you* in

spirits:—it is not every day that *we* enjoy ourselves. I suppose that when you come out, sir, in this uncommonly lively humour, your friends think it right, in honour of the occurrence, to let you have it all to yourself," added Mr. Compton, glancing first at Lord Lymington, who was silently turning over some drawings, and then at Maximilian. "I advise you young people to get up a dance, Mr. Wentworth, by way of something to do; for, upon my word, some of you look like mutes at a funeral. Where is Alice, madam?" he suddenly exclaimed to his wife, as his eye fell upon Lindesay conversing with Mrs. Tresham.

"Alice has had a head-ache all day, and is gone to her room poorly, my dear Mr. Compton," said his wife, who had been questioning Miss Wentworth respecting her daughter's disappearance. The sight of Mr. Tresham probably tended more than the news of Alice's indisposition to appease her father's irritation;

and, Dora having been dismissed to bed too early to admit of any indulgence of her eavesdropping propensities, no fresh accession of disgrace with him was added to the various uncomfortable feelings of surprise and mortification with which, after her conversation with Tresham Alice had hastened to the seclusion of her own chamber.

## CHAPTER XI.

"You know your own disease, Sir, mistrust and jealousy,
And what occasion I have given you for them;
If you both hold me fair and trustworthy,
Let me go fearless forth, and earn that confidence."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MR. COMPTON had accepted Lord Chellingham's invitation to remain with his family for a few days at Chellingham Castle, after the ball there, preparatory to their return to Dorsetshire; and on Melicent's descending to the saloon the next morning, she found him warmly expressing to Sir Arthur the gratification his

visit to Wentworth Court had afforded him, while his wife was still more profuse in her acknowledgments of gratitude, and in her regret, that this was the last morning to be spent with their hospitable friends.

The congratulations received by Melicent on the visible alteration for the better in the state of her health, did not tend to lessen the heightened complexion which had called them forth; and her uncle expressed himself much rejoiced, to find that no necessity for uneasiness existed on her account, and that he should not be called upon to fulfil his yesterday's determination, of recommending her to give up all thoughts of going to the ball. Sir Arthur confessed, that he would have been particularly grieved, if Melicent had not been able to pay his lordship the proper compliment of appearing at his fête.

While carefully refraining from looking towards Colonel Lindesay, Melicent was aware that he was earnestly endeavouring to gain her atten-

tion, probably from a desire to enter into some justification of his conduct, before he set out with the other gentlemen for Chellingham Castle, where the morning was to be employed in shooting over the Earl's extensive preserves. Once he had almost succeeded in effecting his purpose, when Walsingham having induced Isabel to grant him a few moment's conversation in the library, before his departure, Mrs. Tresham also in the most provoking manner, rose to leave the room; but so manifest an intention of accompanying her was shown by Melicent, that Lindesay, probably convinced of the inutility of his efforts, soon after retreated from their presence.

Walsingham, meanwhile, alone with Isabel, was warmly urging her to sanction his application for her uncle's consent to a speedy solemnization of their marriage.

"You at least, Isabel, cannot now fail to be convinced of the power you possess over me, of

my determination to render you happy. Influenced by your wishes, have I not patiently endured the presence of a rival? Nay, even more, trusting to a purity and candour, rarely met with in your sex, did I not leave you unguarded in his society? Tell me then, have I not earned the right to complain, that our engagement should still be kept so generally a secret, and why—if still you are willing to agree to its prompt ratification, do you shrink from avowing to others, the preference you have bestowed upon me?"

Isabel blushed deeply as she replied: "I will readily promise not to deny our engagement; but surely you cannot expect me to do more. Your own delicacy would condemn the display of sentiments which every woman would wish to bury in her inmost heart; and while mine is revealed to you, Walsingham, is not it sufficient?"

"Isabel, my love makes me encroaching. I

cannot endure to see you approached by others, to think that your ear is profaned by the idle breath of flattery, if not by the words of love. I would have such boldness checked, by your allowing me to prove, that mine is the sole right to the notice they presumptuously usurp, and by your granting to me alone, the attention which is exclusively my due."

"These are idle words, Walsingham, since you know that I have always most willingly permitted you to retain your station by my side, and that it is your own wayward mood which so often makes you desert your post."

Isabel smiled as she spoke, but her lover angrily replied, "And is it strange, that I should be driven from it, when your attention is every moment distracted by the claims of others? My powers of forbearance have been sufficiently taxed, and it is surely time that these harassing scruples on your part should be dismissed, and that by permitting me to-night

to assume publicly the character which of right belongs to me, you afford me the proof, yet wanting, that you do not repent of your perhaps incautious selection. I demand, if you really love me, that this night no other, Lord Lymington most particularly, be suffered to approach you,—that you grant to me exclusively, word, look, and smile; and that your hand, which a few weeks will render my own, be not yielded even for a moment to any man but myself."

"The part you assign to me, Walsingham, would be improper in itself, besides rendering me too painfully conspicuous. I am, however, most willing to remain at home, and thus avoid all danger of incurring your displeasure."

"You will not then, make the most trifling concession to devotion like mine, nor relinquish for my sake, one sensation of gratified vanity?—And this you call love!—Every friend you have, is honoured with warmer feelings,—far deeper, I apprehend, are those you bestow upon

your more fortunate cousin! Mr. Wentworth's good offices are sufficiently manifest. Had he claimed what I have thus humbly sued for, it would unhesitatingly have been granted."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Walsingham," said Isabel, the deep crimson mounting to her temples, as she rose from her seat. "I feel, however, that I neither can, nor ought to subject myself longer to a violence so unbecoming, and which I trust your cooler reason will teach you to repent. It shall be my study to conduct myself in such a manner, as not to incur blame deservedly. Accusations so vague and insulting, as your passion now leads you to utter, are in my opinion wholly unworthy of attention."

As she concluded speaking, Isabel slowly withdrew from the apartment, and in a few minutes, she heard Walsingham leave the house, and join the rest of the gentlemen, who were setting off for Chellingham Castle.

Isabel's determination not to accompany them that evening, excited the utmost regret in her uncle and sister, the latter of whom regarded the circumstance as the one thing requisite to complete her dislike of Walsingham, and her own disinclination to leave home. It was impossible for Isabel wholly to conceal the cause of her sudden change of plan, and in vain she strove by her cheerfulness to prove that the sacrifice cost her nothing, and that it was principally her own choice to appear no more in public before her marriage. Already averse to all thoughts of gaiety, the idea of appearing at the Earl's fête without Isabel,—of knowing her to be left to such necessarily gloomy reflections, completed Melicent's wretchedness: her dejection throughout the day was invincible, and when, as a last resource, Isabel joined with Mrs. Tresham in endeavouring to interest her in her preparations for the evening, their efforts remained equally unsuccessful. Though

not like Miss Compton, disposed to agree in the opinion of the paramount importance of the toilette, Melicent was wont, on ordinary occasions, to pay a reasonable attention to its feminine duties. Now, to Isabel's surprise, she manifested a total indifference on the subject, and it was only by dint of their perseverance, and the skill of Mademoiselle Celestine, that the task was at length satisfactorily completed. When Sir Arthur reluctantly gave the signal for departure, and her friends left Isabel to the solitude they would willingly have shared, she had, however, the consolation of knowing that her exertions on behalf of her languid sister's appearance were fully repaid, and that the absence of Melicent's accustomed animation, only imparted greater interest to the beauty which had lately assumed so entirely novel a character.

## CHAPTER XII.

"On revient toujours à ses premiers amours!"

Within his illuminated halls, upon whose noble proportions every decoration had been lavished that wealth or taste could command, the Earl of Chellingham received his numerous guests, courteously deprecating, with proud humility, the universal admiration elicited by the splendour of his preparations. While wearing his blandest smile in welcome to all, there was, nevertheless, so marked a difference in his reception of the party from Wentworth Court,

that many a fair damsel, after wistfully surveying the gorgeous scene, cast a glance of envy upon Miss Wentworth, as the Earl conducted her through the long suite of apartments, to the upper end of the stateliest room, and expressed, while he installed her there, his earnest hope, that she would not repent her benevolent exertions in his favour.

Every enquiry after the cause of her sister's absence augmented the vexation not only of Melicent, but also of Sir Arthur; and it was still worse, when the members of their party, who had preceded them in the morning to Chellingham Castle, crowded round them in surprise and anxiety.

"Surely Isabel has not remained alone at Wentworth Court," exclaimed Maximilian, while Walsingham, who had also approached, waited in silence to hear the answer which he disdained himself to solicit. "She cannot be ill, for then you would not have left her, Meli-

cent; but what other reason can possibly have led to her disappointing my uncle and every one by her absence?"

"It must be very recently that Miss Isabel Wentworth has learned to be capricious!" said Lymington, who easily divined from Melicent's embarrassed excuses, and Walsingham's moody aspect, that some altercation with him had been the cause of Isabel's non-appearance. "For my part, I do not see what business any of us have here. Certainly the pleasure we are likely to find, need not give umbrage to the most laughter-hating individual in the universe. It would be impossible, I should think, for any one of us to enjoy himself, knowing your sister to be immured at Wentworth Court!"

"Isabel was right, as she always is, in remaining at home," observed Sir Arthur. "Let us say no more upon the subject, since I believe we all agree in thinking that the splendid entertainment my friend the Earl has provided for

us, sadly wants the presence of my once light-hearted Isabel."

"How happy your sister looked at that pleasant ball at Comerford when we first knew you!" persisted Lymington, addressing Melicent, after Sir Arthur had moved on. "My most earnest desire, were it granted me, Miss Wentworth, would be for the power of obliterating all that has since occurred, and restoring every thing to the aspect it wore on that delightful evening!"

While the mortification and regret experienced by Sir Arthur and Melicent rendered their manner towards Mr. Walsingham cold and distant, the unexpected decision of Isabel tended still more to enhance in his mind the irritability occasioned by their conversation of the morning. Indignant at her preferring to remain at home, to a compliance with his wishes, his ill-humour encreased every moment, and the undisguised concern of Lord Lymington adding fuel to the

flame, he was at length induced to consider himself alone the aggrieved person, and to impute the conduct of his betrothed rather to a determination not to relinquish her claims to general admiration, than to its real origin of consideration for his wayward and jealous feelings. Nor did Lord Lymington appear by any means deficient in the repayment he made for Walsingham's haughty dislike; and, ever unfriendly towards each other, their demeanour on this occasion was marked by a decided hostility, extending alike to look and word.

Although relieved from the dread of Lindesay's assiduities, by his making no effort to approach her, Melicent's own sensations were too gloomy to be chased away by the surrounding gaiety; and even Tresham's powers of conversation were vainly exerted to cheer the lady of the festival, while with feelings as little as possible consonant with the scene, she continued to occupy her involuntary post of honour.

Suddenly a familiar sound attracted the attention of Melicent and her friends. That laugh!—there could hardly be a doubt respecting its identity in the minds of any who had ever been its auditors. Another moment removed all uncertainty, and they found themselves warmly greeted by their Penzance acquaintance, Lord and Lady Pentonville.

"I can scarcely call this an unexpected pleasure," observed her ladyship, "since Lord P. and myself have been looking forward with infinite satisfaction towards meeting on this occasion with some of the agreeable party who enlivened our excursion to the Western extremity. But how seldom, my dear Mrs. Tresham, are our pleasurable emotions untinctured by sadder feelings! My poor brother! you must remember what a terribly delicate state of health he was in; yet still we were always sanguine—we fondly trusted, that change of air and scene would preserve him to us for many years. But

he was too far gone! That last journey to Scarborough was quite too much for poor Sir Andrew."

While Mrs. Tresham expressed to the affectionate sister the real concern she felt at the intelligence thus communicated, his lordship was adding his comments on the subject to Mr. Tresham.

"Yes, poor Sir Andrew's gone after all! We can't expect constant invalids like him to last for ever, ha, ha, ha! By the bye, the old fellow cut up better than we expected, ha, ha!—and of course his sister's watchful care made him think it his duty to leave her every thing, ha, ha, ha! It wasn't the money, certainly; Letty was too much afflicted to care about that, you know, ha, ha!—but then it was such a consolation to think, that poor Sir Andrew, ha, ha! was conscious of our affection and solicitude, ha, ha, ha!—and now Letty is beginning to listen to reason, and to own, that of course it is all for the best; ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"If you recollect, Lord P., one of our last conversations with poor Sir Andrew, was about our pleasant day at Penzance. He was a great admirer of your sister, Miss Wentworth, whom I am sorry not to see here to-night, and he was speaking of you both; but we could not exactly make out his meaning. Poor Sir Andrew always had such a very peculiar way of speaking! He never liked the North, and often used to say, how much he should have liked to try your mild Devonshire air; but then he never knew what was advisable for his shattered constitution, did he, Lord P.?"

"Oh no! not in the least!—we were obliged absolutely to force him to set off on his last journey—ha, ha, ha!—he hated moving so—ha, ha! If anything would have cured him, it must have been that healthy, bracing air; and so when Letty and I saw what a deplorable state the poor fellow was in—ha, ha!—we spared no pains to get him there,—travelling with the

utmost speed—ha, ha!—day and night—ha, ha, ha!—not minding ourselves, of course, in such an emergency!—but all was of no use—the fatigue quite did for poor Sir Andrew!—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Lady Pentonville now took a seat beside Mrs. Tresham and Miss Wentworth, in order to dissipate her melancholy sensations by a little agreeable conversation; and while her lord went to communicate to other friends the news of poor Sir Andrew's decease, and Letty's consequent affliction and realised expectations, Tresham sought Miss Compton, whom he easily drew from the side of her mother, and persuaded to join the dancers. The self-reproaches wherewith he had observed her evident depression, induced him to exert his utmost endeavours to cheer and amuse her; but the spell was dissolved—the light and lively accents which had formerly had so inspiriting an influence, were replied to only by dejection and gloom;—

and when, at last, their conversation took on her part an air of deeper interest, the expression of annoyance on Tresham's countenance was in proportion with the increasing agitation of his companion. Tears were in her eyes, and he was vainly striving to avert the scene which appeared inevitable, when an opportune relief was afforded (though not, perhaps, in the exact shape he would have chosen) by the advance of Mr. Compton, who had been watching with great displeasure the confirmed alienation of Colonel Lindesay, and imagined himself now to have discovered its cause in his daughter's prolonged colloquy with Tresham.

"Allow me to take charge of you, madam," said he. "There are fathers and daughters enough in the room, ready to be made fools of, Mr. Tresham. Do not let Miss Compton and myself entirely monopolise your attention!"

In the shadow of the doorway through which Alice was conducted by her irascible father, in

order to reach the saloon where she had left her mother, Walsingham was standing in a mood evidently too congenial with Mr. Compton's own to escape his unflattering animadversions.

"So, Mr. Walsingham," he remarked, "balls are not in your way any more than in mine. We both seem quite out of our element; and I commend your sagacity in leaving the young lady at home to whom you might possibly wish to appear to advantage. It must be satisfactory, Sir, to know that she, at all events, is not likely to be more pleasantly engaged while you stand gloomily here in the passage!"

Mr. Compton was privileged to be disagreeable; and the smile which his speech brought to the countenance of Lord Lymington, who was passing at the moment, effectually diverted the attention of Walsingham. Following the young nobleman into the corridor, "I have been waiting for this opportunity, my Lord," he angrily exclaimed, "to recall to your

recollection the observations you were pleased to make not long since, and which neither of us is likely to have forgotten. Since when, and by what right, I am determined to know, do you assume an interest in Miss Isabel Wentworth's proceedings? I have yet to learn in what possible manner they can influence the opinions or actions of Lord Lymington."

"And I am equally ignorant of Mr. Walsingham's title to interfere with my actions or expressions," answered Lymington, passionately. "Whatever others may be, I am not disposed, I can assure you, to submit to the controul it is your pleasure so frequently and unnecessarily to exercise."

"Are you mad, Lymington, that you enter into such a dispute?" said Max, who, having watched their encounter, had hastily followed to prevent the consequences he perceived likely to happen. "My cousin will be little obliged to

those who make her the subject of an altercation so inconsiderate and ill-timed."

"I beg your pardon, Wentworth," said Lymington, recalled to his better self by Maximilian's earnestness;—"Mr. Walsingham, let us forget what we have both said, and which, for my part, I candidly confess, admits of little defence."

"As you please, my Lord," returned Walsingham, arrogantly. "I am less inclined to make concessions at the bidding of Mr. Wentworth, or to accept apologies tendered only from the interested motive of being favourably reported of to his fair cousin."

"You shall not answer him—he will acknowledge his ungraciousness when his present humour has passed off," urged Mr. Wentworth, as he drew his reluctant friend away. "You would not involve Isabel's name surely in a quarrel with Walsingham?—he has not forgiven the interest you expressed in her."

"It would be doing her a great favour to shoot him!" said Lymington. "I will not do it if I can help it; but sooner or later, depend upon it, he will put an end to himself, or find a friend to do the business for him, in one of these fits of mad jealousy."

"Let me hope that Miss Wentworth does not weary of to-night's compulsory inaction!" said the Earl, placing himself beside her, and assuming his most irresistible manner. "Were she conscious of the becoming nature of her present graceful and interesting languor, she would scarcely regret her temporary deprivation of the power of joining the votaries of Terpsichore in the elaborate and fantastic mazes of the dance."

"I assure you I have found ample amusement in being merely a spectatress of this brilliant scene, and have not the slightest wish to relin-

quish my present agreeable inactivity," replied Melicent.

" I rejoice to hear it, and will, with your permission, enact for a limited period a similar part. It does not, indeed, appear unlikely, or at all in opposition with the opinion which circumstances have permitted me to form of Miss Wentworth's sentiments, that while allowing its due merit to the graceful and attractive exhibition we are now regarding, she may with the less reluctance abstain from conforming, in this instance, with the usages of society so far as concerns young ladies of her birth and station mingling in the dance, from feeling that there is something infinitely more dignified and noble in the tranquillity and repose of her present situation. There are few among my fair and lovely guests whom I should more peculiarly distinguish as models of reserved and elevated propriety than your friend Miss Compton; and she, we may hope, coincides in the opinion I have presumed to ex-

press, and which, in a still bolder and more unauthorised manner, I have ventured to ascribe to Miss Wentworth. We may contrast most favourably, on this occasion, the deportment of that truly admirable and excellent young lady, and another of the same exalted stamp, to whom I dare not at this moment more distinctly allude, with the volatility and coquetry which we cannot refrain from noticing in the less perfect portion of the feminine community. Colonel Lindesay, for whom I entertain the highest respect and regard, may well be envied by those who would willingly secure the esteem and affection of those fair and distinguished ornaments of their sex, who, like Miss Compton, confer honour and obligation in accepting that rank which, as British matrons of the highest class, they are so eminently qualified to adorn!"

The flow of Lord Chellingham's eloquence was here interrupted by the summons to the

banqueting-room; but, though forced to relinquish the pleasure of conducting Miss Wentworth, he took care that a distinguished station there should be assigned to her, and that she should still continue to be the principal object of his attentions.

It could not have been from any degree of encouragement afforded by the still indignant Melicent, that Colonel Lindesay was induced, late in the evening, to break through the prudent resolution he had formed, of remaining at a distance equally from her and Alice. Although sensible that he had seldom left her vicinity throughout the night, Melicent had never directed a look towards him; and the instant withdrawal of her eye when accidentally encountering his, sufficiently manifested the yet unabated vigour of her resentment. Even though his air, on at length approaching her, was well adapted by its respect to deprecate her ire, she was not to be appeased;—the tone of his voice,

to her distrustful ear, seemed more confident than formerly;—the most trivial remark he made annoyed her; and while she turned with a sensation of relief even to Lady Pentonville to avoid engaging in a conversation with him, it seemed satisfaction enough for Lindesay to remain by her side, endeavouring to dissipate her embarrassed reserve.

"I've just been very much shocked to hear what an alarming accident you met with, Miss Wentworth!" said Lord Pentonville, approaching her sofa with Mr. Tresham, and indulging in one of his loudest fits of risibility. "Upon my word, it's almost miraculous that you escaped with your life—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Heavens, Lord P., what a dreadful idea!—you really have quite startled Miss Wentworth by your incautious abruptness."

"Never fear!—Miss Wentworth will get over it, Lady P. She doesn't look as if she were going to die yet—ha, ha, ha! Now I think of

it, though, you always had a very charming complexion when we saw you at Penzance—ha, ha!—You've not given up walking before breakfast, eh, Miss Wentworth?—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

His Lordship glanced provokingly, while he spoke, at Lindesay, who, on his part, seemed surprised and amused at Melicent's extraordinary and familiar acquaintance.

"I've done all I could to persuade Letty to adopt your plan of taking an early walk in agreeable company—ha, ha, ha! It was a capital cosmetic! wasn't it, Mr. Tresham? But you seem to have other embellishments of the same nature at hand in Devonshire—ha, ha!—and keep your amusements in the mining way for your visits to Cornwall—ha, ha, ha!—I suppose that poor Inspector has thrown himself down one of his own mines, in despair, long ago!—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah! yes, poor Hopkinson!" said Tresham.

"He put an end to his existence very shortly after you saw him. I fear Miss Wentworth was fickle, and her subsequent cruelty proved too much for the poor man."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!—Gentlemen will be cautious in venturing upon such dangerous ground, Miss Wentworth—ha, ha!—Your sister, we know, wouldn't have anything to say to him from the first; but you and he seemed to have taken an uncommon fancy to each other—ha, ha, ha!—But here comes that pompous old Earl;—and I think we had better keep the tinman snug!—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Melicent's attention was somewhat diverted from the diffuse oration with which Lord Chellingham addressed her, by observing that Lord P. had entered into conversation with Lindesay, who seemed to derive considerable amusement from his confidential communications, interrupted as they were by sundry bursts of laughter, and frequent glances towards herself. Lord

Chellingham at length moved away, and Lord Pentonville immediately turned towards her.

"What, won't he do neither?—you look tired to death of the old prig already!—ha, ha, ha!—Upon my word, young ladies are astonishingly particular now-a-days!—ha, ha, ha!—Turns her back upon the Inspector,—ha, ha!—Won't listen to an Earl's stupid speeches!—ha, ha!—What can you have fixed your mind upon catching at last?—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Lord P., your behaviour cannot have given Miss Wentworth a fascinating idea of connubial happiness! Have you not left me here alone all the evening? But I am accustomed, Miss Wentworth, to pine in solitary desertion, a prey to listlessness and ennui. Lord P. always leaves me thus!—and then, after expending his wit and vivacity with others, returns to inflict upon his wife the harassed and worn-out relics of his exhausted fancy!"

"That's always Letty's way!—ha, ha!—to

hear her talk, one would think she was the most miserable woman in the world,—ha, ha, ha!—as if old married people were to stick constantly to each other like the Siamese Twins!—ha, ha, ha!—It's all quite right, as Miss Wentworth knows, that those who have to win the fair should stand for hours behind her sofa—ha, ha!—thankful for a word,—ha, ha, ha!—but we married men have the privilege of enjoying ourselves,—ha, ha!—sitting in our easy chairs,—ha, ha!—or quizzing young ladies,—ha, ha, ha!"

"These were not always your sentiments, Lord P.! But I suppose we form too high an idea of the perfections of matrimonial felicity. While we are employing all our feminine attractions to fix our truant husbands, we can scarcely be expected to feel grateful for trifling favours so reluctantly accorded!"

"Now Letty's in one of her lackadaisical humours!—ha, ha, ha!—She's as happy as the

day is long,—ha, ha, ha!—And as for me, I advise all you bachelors, Colonel, to get wives as fast as possible to take care of you,—ha, ha, ha!—There are plenty of pretty girls would be glad enough to have you any day,—ha, ha!—and so you had better make up your mind, and take the desperate leap at once!—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"With so competent a judge as Lord Pentonville for its advocate, I can scarcely doubt the felicity of the matrimonial state," said Lindesay. "If her ladyship, however, be permitted to disseminate her treasonable opinions, I fear my amenability to reason and good counsel will profit me little."

"Never fear, my good friend!—you a soldier, and not know that none but the brave deserve the fair?—ha, ha!—Strike while the iron's hot, and never be daunted by a lady's frown!—ha, ha, ha!—They always like to be taken by contraries, eh, Miss Wentworth?—ha, ha!—When

next we light upon each other, I dare say I shall find you both quite of my opinion,—ha, ha, ha! —for Miss Wentworth seems—ha, ha!—to have quite got the tinman out of her head,—ha, ha, ha!—So much the better!—It's well to be off with the old love before we begin with the new,—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Good night, and *au revoir!* my dear Miss Wentworth. We are only birds of passage in this neighbourhood, and who knows what may chance before we meet again? You, however, are stationary here for the night;—and Mrs. Tresham, I see, has already availed herself of her privilege of retiring to her couch, whilst we have miles to traverse, exposed to the inclemency of the season. Tell Mrs. T. how much Lord P. and myself have enjoyed meeting with her on this occasion. It has, indeed, been a melancholy satisfaction to us both to be able to talk over with her her old favourite, poor Sir Andrew!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Refuse a Lord?—a saucy lady this!"
THE HUNCHBACK.

MOST sanguine were the expectations of the Earl of Chellingham, when, on the morning following his splendid festival, he demanded a private conference with Sir Arthur Wentworth, previously to his departure from the Castle. The results of their interview were never precisely ascertained, although Miss Wentworth also was summoned to lend her aid on the occasion. On their reappearance, however, the Earl's wonted eloquence seemed entirely to have

deserted him; and it was in silence, though with unabated courtesy and attention, that he handed Miss Wentworth to her carriage.

As they drew near Wentworth Court, the thoughts of Sir Arthur and his niece reverted to Isabel and her future prospects. Decidedly unworthy of her as both now considered Walsingham, her uncle was more than ever determined not to sanction her being hurried into an union so little likely to be conducive to her happiness. Walsingham had been seen no more at Chellingham Castle after the earlier part of the preceding night, and they concluded that he had returned to his desolate home as more in unison with his gloomy frame of mind than the brilliant scene where he had seemed so ill at ease.

Miss Compton, to whom the gaieties of the evening had appeared equally unwelcome, had now recovered more than her usual spirits, and was manifesting a degree of animation the

more remarkable from her late dejection, when Sir Arthur and his party left her that morning, the centre of admiration to the numerous guests at Chellingham Castle.

The cheerfulness which Isabel had assumed in order to lessen Melicent's concern at leaving her, did not endure when the necessity for dissimulation was over. Never had she looked upon her future destiny with such gloomy forebodings —never felt so convinced that the hour wherein she plighted her faith to Walsingham had been the harbinger of anxieties and mortifications to which she could now foresee no termination. Like many that had proved equally fallacious, the hope that her readiness to conclude their union would make a permanent impression on him had now died away. She could recall no adequate cause for the renewal of his jealousy, which seemed indeed scarcely to have been extinguished, since his words during their last

interview plainly bespoke him as suspicious as ever. She grieved for him whom she found it impossible to render happy, and felt that the marriage in which she had long ceased to anticipate tranquillity for herself was even less likely to impart it to Walsingham.

Nor was his happiness alone involved with hers—Melicent, Sir Arthur, her cousin, no trial could befal her wherein they would not share. As long as Walsingham's suspicions had pointed solely at Lord Lymington, she had borne them better; but now she perceived that the slightest mark of attention and kindness to her was liable to be converted into an injury to himself,—that every feeling must be sacrificed to the encroachments of the selfish attachment which refused to its object even the endearing claims of family affection. Her fortitude almost gave way before the picture which she vainly strove to banish from before her eyes, of a home embittered by distrust and continually increasing jealousy; for had not Wal-

singham's failings become more evident after every concession on her part? These were not the sacrifices which, in the first moments of her acknowledged attachment, she had contemplated with such pleasure; nor was this the life of devotion to her happiness which her gratified lover had taught her to expect.

Yet still he loved her—it was that which rendered him so unreasonable, and Isabel cherished the expectation that her consideration for his feelings in remaining at Wentworth Court upon the present occasion would be rightly and fully appreciated. Incapable of employment, she left the house on the following morning, and half convinced that the earliest possible period of the day would bring the penitent to seek pardon for his waywardness, she turned her steps towards that entrance to the Park where she had often lately encountered Walsingham on his way from Marchwood. As if to certify her hopes, before she reached it, the tread of his steed along the

road denoted his approach, and in a few moments, Walsingham, having caught sight of her through the leafless branches of the plantation, dismounted, and fastening his horse to the gate, advanced to meet her. His countenance was flushed and animated, and the hand she yielded was retained with a pressure which denoted no inconsiderable agitation. His first expression was of pleasure at meeting her thus unexpectedly. "Did you come hither with the wish to see me, dear Isabel?—Thank Heaven, I chose this path!"

Isabel did not deny that the possibility of such an encounter had brought her to that spot, and then added, "But you are earlier, Walsingham, than I had looked even for you. It was kind in you to recollect that I should be alone, since the rest of the party can scarcely return from Chellingham Castle till late in the afternoon."

Her words seemed to cause a sudden revul-

sion in Walsingham's feelings, as if recalling ideas which had been momentarily dispelled by her unexpected appearance. The smile vanished from his features as he said gloomily,

"It is the pleasure of Sir Arthur and your sister to regard me as the cause of your absence from that detested ball—as if I were answerable for the unaccountable caprice which kept you here! Your total disregard for my feelings, in exposing me to so unmerited a reproach, may well excuse the irritability which your extraordinary conduct could not but occasion."

"Believe me, my sole motive for remaining at home was to avoid giving you pain, Walsingham. A thousand circumstances over which I had no control might, I knew, render my presence last night a source of uneasiness rather than of pleasure to you."

"I do willingly believe you, Isabel," said Walsingham, in milder accents, again taking the hand he had relinquished during his angry

speech. "Would that the gentleness which I prize so dearly did not afford me another ground for inquietude! But when they tell you, dearest, that I was gloomy and unfriendly last night towards those you love, will you not yield to their persuasions to renounce all thought of an union with one of a disposition so ill according with your own?—or will my Isabel remember that she was not by my side to drive away tormenting suggestions—that every moment recalled to me our angry parting, and brought yet deeper apprehensions for the consequences which might follow resentment so unusual on the part of my oft-provoked but forgiving Isabel?"

"Indeed, Walsingham, such fears are needless," replied Isabel, softened by his gentleness: "no one will attempt the persuasions you imagine—you must be accused of errors far greater than any I have yet witnessed in you,

before I would even listen to an argument against a contract I hold as sacred."

Walsingham listened with his eyes fixed upon her countenance, every moment his gaze became more ardent, and his voice trembled with subdued excitement when he next addressed her:—

"A thousand thanks, dearest!—I ask but one proof more,—accord it, and never, by Heaven, will I injure feelings so pure and generous by a single doubt! Place it beyond your power to yield to arguments which, I warn you, will be more cogent than you now anticipate. Promise me, that no entreaties shall avail to part us—that nothing which has occurred during the last few hours shall be allowed to weigh against months of love like mine. I know your spotless sincerity, your unalterable faith, and that oath passed, shall fearlessly regard you as my own."

Walsingham trembled with eagerness as he spoke, and his excited manner made Isabel pause ere she pronounced what yet seemed to her little more than a renewal of her already existing engagement.

"What means this, Mr. Walsingham?—I little expected to find *you* here!" said Maximilian, who having approached them unobserved, now stood beside Isabel, confronting her lover, upon whose countenance the bitterest mortification had replaced his previous animation. "Let me advise your instant withdrawal. I will myself conduct Miss Wentworth to the house."

Terrified at the probable reception of so uncourteous an address, Isabel looked entreatingly at both; but Walsingham had other thoughts, and recovering from the disagreeable surprise occasioned by Mr. Wentworth's approach, he said hurriedly to Isabel,

"I am indeed lingering here too long when

duty calls me elsewhere. Give me the assurance I asked for, and I am gone."

"And is it possible that you can urge my cousin to such imprudence while I am here to guard her?—that you would make her own unsuspicious and generous confidence the means of involving her in difficulty? The tidings I bring you, Mr. Walsingham, may teach you how impossible it is that I should allow you to remain here a moment longer."

Maximilian's next words were spoken to Walsingham in so low a voice as to be inaudible to the terrified girl, but their effect was instantaneous. A deep gloom overspread Walsingham's features, and without attempting to address her again, he suffered her cousin to lead her from the spot. A moment afterwards she heard the sound of his horse's feet rapidly departing.

Her confidence in Maximilian had caused her to yield implicitly to his guidance, and even Walsingham's ardent passions seemed for once

to have been checked by his firmness and decision in putting an end to their interview. What circumstances could have induced her cousin to separate her from her acknowledged lover, and Walsingham to submit to his authoritative dismissal, Isabel trembled to learn, and her companion appeared to find it no easy task to reveal. The distance to the house was considerably diminished before she summoned courage to break the painful silence which Mr. Wentworth still maintained.

"For Heaven's sake tell me what has passed: you would not alarm me thus, Maximilian, without cause."

"I am indeed unwilling to tell you how much your confidence in his honour has been abused by Mr. Walsingham. Thank Heaven, I saved you from that fatal promise! The man who could take such advantage of your unconscious reliance upon him deserves the pangs he is now suffering. Isabel, you must be firm—I

know not how to save you from the pain my intelligence will cause you. In spite of my efforts, a quarrel at Chellingham Castle took place between Walsingham and Lymington. Frank is at Danesfield—we hope recovering," he added, seeing Isabel's speechless anxiety to hear more; "but Walsingham must have used the utmost speed to secure his interview with you, after leaving the ground upon which they fought."

Isabel's unselfish feelings had at once reverted from Lord Lymington's situation to the distress of the sister who was so fondly attached to him, and the first words she could utter were an inquiry after Mrs. Tresham.

"I have not seen her," replied Mr. Wentworth; "my first thought, my first anxiety was to prevent your accidentally learning what had taken place. Little did I imagine that I should find Walsingham here. Every feeling of honour and delicacy, I should have concluded, would

prevent his insulting by his presence her whom his conduct had so deeply outraged."

A faltered inquiry as to the origin of the quarrel forced Maximilian to be more explicit.

"The quarrel, I fear I must tell you, was entirely Walsingham's. I was myself the witness of Lymington's resolution to avoid for your sake giving any provocation to his violence. From those who were around them at the time of the challenge, I learn that it was forced upon Frank, who did all that could be done by a man of honour to avoid the meeting. I assure you, we are not without great hopes that he may ultimately recover. Lindesay was sent for immediately by Sir Frederick, whose house was the nearest dwelling, and I shall myself hasten thither for fresh intelligence as soon as Melicent's return enables me to consign you to better care than mine."

Isabel could make no reply. The fortitude she had been struggling to maintain was threat-

ening to desert her, before the new subjects for distress and anxiety which every moment suggested to her mind. With difficulty she reached the house ; but when there, some hours of solitude and reflection were requisite, before she could nerve herself to meet Mrs. Tresham on her return, and bear the sight of the grief which was convulsing her delicate frame. The interval, however, had not been uselessly employed ; pale indeed, but composed, she was able to assist Melicent in her cures for their friend, whom it was impossible to leave for an instant. At his wife's earnest entreaty, Tresham had remained at Danesfield, and it was not till early the next morning that Mr. Wentworth's arrival with tidings of Lord Lymington's having passed the night better than had been expected by his attendants released Melicent for a short time from her post. Leaving Isabel with Mrs. Tresham, she hastened down stairs, to learn what farther particulars might be collected from their cousin's report.

Maximilian was pacing the apartment in a state of unwonted agitation when she entered. His first anxious inquiries were for Isabel, and reassured by Melicent's account of the strength of mind she had shown, he said,

"I assure you, Melicent, Frank deeply regrets the distress which this wretched business must occasion her, but it was unavoidable; or rather, the fault, if any, rests with me. I ought not to have left him;—I might have known that his high spirit would not long brook Walsingham's studied insolence; irritated too, as Frank had previously been, by his knowledge of the unmanly tyranny which kept Isabel secluded at home."

"Do not reproach yourself, Max, since it appears that nothing could have been done. I have long feared some open rupture, though I did not imagine that Mr. Walsingham's unfounded jealousy could lead him to offer so great an insult to my sister."

"He is capable of any excess of violence and folly when influenced by feelings to which, in their intensity, you must be a stranger. Isabel cannot longer resist the conviction of his utter unworthiness; Walsingham has trampled under foot every tie that bound them together, and merits nothing from her but contempt and indignation."

"I earnestly trust that such may be her opinion," replied Melicent; "Isabel, however, has hitherto manifested so firm a resolution of fulfilling her engagement, that whatever I may desire, I dare not pronounce what her decision may be."

"She must not be permitted to hesitate. I need not tell you, Melicent, how unworthy of her affection Walsingham has ever been, nor will I trust myself to speak of him as his last action deserves. Isabel must be saved from becoming his wife. She is too good, too beautiful, too precious to be linked to such a des-

tiny. Never can I endure to see her thus peril her happiness—nay, her very existence!—Never, while I live, shall she be the wife of Walsingham!"

Alarmed at the unusual vehemence and anger of her cousin, Melicent answered,

"Let us hope that Isabel will continue to show her present firmness, in decidedly rejecting one who has at last proved himself deficient in principle, as well as destitute of confidence in her whom he professes to love."

"And does he dare to call his selfish, unworthy passion by a name so sacred? Can the man to whom Isabel has given her heart, whom she has loved and trusted with such forgiving gentleness, entertain a doubt of her sincerity? Would that she had not disregarded the attachment of him, who would have deemed sacrilege such a suspicion of her truth! Madman that he is, to cast away happiness so precious—love so tried and true! Had I been fortunate enough

to gain the affection of the only woman I ever loved—whom from the first moment I beheld, I have passionately but hopelessly adored,—never should she have suffered a pang from which my protection should shield her—never have regretted her generous confidence in bestowing upon me the privilege of guarding from assaults like these, the welfare of the being dearer to me than life! Forgive me, dear Melicent, for having alarmed you," he continued, assuming a more collected air, as Sir Arthur's approaching step sounded in the hall. "Watch over our dear Isabel,—keep her from farther affliction, and forget, as it deserves, the folly by which your countenance tells me that I have increased the anxiety I came to lessen."

The next moment he was gone, and with another cause for inquietude, added to those which had before oppressed her, Melicent returned to Mrs. Tresham's apartment, sighing to think how ill her sister had judged her own

prospects of happiness, and how far more worthy Maximilian would have been of her affection, than he had proved himself on whom her preference had so incautiously fallen.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"So here's the lady in tears, the lover in a rage, the old gentleman out of his senses, most of the company distracted, and the bridegroom in a fair way to be hanged—the merriest wedding that ever I saw in my life!"

SHE WOULD, AND SHE WOULD NOT.

WITH thoughts distracted from the volume he held in his hand, by the solicitude inspired by the late events, Sir Arthur was alone in his library on the following day, when Isabel, with a countenance betraying by its paleness the struggles it cost her to maintain her self-possession, entered the room, and placed before him a letter in Mr. Walsingham's handwriting.

"Will you, my dearest uncle, now undertake what once you kindly promised, the guidance of my conduct? Will you tell me, whether the want of principle and total disregard for my feelings, evinced by Mr. Walsingham in the late unhappy occurrence, do not justify my retracting a promise made under so different an impression of his character to that which I am now forced to entertain?"

"Isabel, your firmness and just discernment have at once relieved me from anxiety of the most painful nature. Do not hesitate for a moment, my child; think not of entrusting your happiness to the charge of one who has proved himself unfit for such a responsibility. Grievous as it would have been to me to exert unwelcome authority over my gentle favourite, I had already firmly resolved never to give my consent to the completion of your engagement."

Isabel sighed deeply, as her uncle tenderly

caressed her. "I have known long," she said dejectedly, "that you, my dear uncle, were right in your warnings, and Melicent only shared in my own secret anticipations of future unhappiness. But while I imagined Mr. Walsingham to be deserving of my esteem, and that the infirmities of his temper and disposition might be softened by affection, I never would have relinquished my hope of repaying his love by overcoming his distrust. I am now convinced of the illusion of such ideas, and that I have no right to afflict my kind friends by deserting them for one who disbelieves in the existence of truth and integrity in woman, and from whom I can expect no enduring confidence in return for the sacrifice I make. How, indeed, can I choose him as my guide and protector, who, while I was proving my sincerity by every means in my power, could be hurried by the most groundless fears into an action which I cannot recall without a shudder! Can Mr.

Walsingham expect me ever to forget, that the agony Lord Lymington's imminent danger has inflicted upon us all, is doubled in its intensity by the thought, that I was the real cause of their meeting; or that, had he met the fate he has so narrowly escaped, my future life must have been one of bitter and self-reproaching sorrow?"

"All that the strictest sense of duty required from you has been done, Isabel; and, knowing this, I can scarcely regret that, by not listening to me earlier, you were not spared this trial. Leave it to me to communicate with Mr. Walsingham on the subject, and fear not that even he should misconstrue a decision founded on such unerring principles."

Isabel laid her hand, for a moment, upon the letter which Sir Arthur had hitherto neglected. "It is unopened, my dearest uncle. No eloquence could shake my stedfast conviction that I am right. Into your hands I resign hence-

forward the destiny which I once rashly sought myself to guide, without farther hope or wish than to manifest my gratitude for my escape from such utter misery by a complete dependance upon the fatherly care which has hitherto striven in vain to guard me from affliction."

The epistle which Isabel now left her uncle to peruse, contained little to mitigate his anger against the writer. Still influenced by the irascible feelings which had urged him to seek the life of his fancied rival, Walsingham asked no forgiveness for the affront offered to the delicacy of Isabel; but, after inveighing against her own behaviour as the real cause of their enmity,—that of Sir Arthur and her sister as having yet more increased his wrath, and Lymington's expressions of concern for her absence, and insulting manner towards himself, as fully authorising the step he had taken,—he called upon her, by an open announcement of her intention of becoming his wife, to anticipate

the probable design of Sir Arthur to retract the consent he had given to their union.

With a deeper sense than ever of Walsingham's unworthiness, Sir Arthur applied himself to the tak of apprising him, in terms the most concise and decided, of his niece's determination of breaking off a marriage fraught with misery to herself, and all those interested in her welfare; and after stating the motives which had governed her unalterable resolution, his own approbation of her conduct, and condemnation of the course Mr. Walsingham had pursued, he ended by desiring that his present decision might be considered as final, and that no future communications might farther endanger the already deeply-injured tranquillity of his beloved child.

The feverish anxiety evinced by Mrs. Tresham to see her brother, and her conviction that the favourable reports transmitted to her were

deceptive, induced Tresham, on his return from Danesfield that afternoon, to yield to her earnest entreaties, and allow her to see Lord Lymington. He had left him better, and he believed that the reality, painful as it was, would be less so to her than the terrors which her over-excited imagination had created. The result proved him to be right. Mrs. Tresham returned, indeed, much exhausted by the agitation she had undergone, but relieved from her worst apprehensions; and Melicent, as she sat beside her friend's couch in the evening, plainly saw the improvement which had been wrought on her spirits, and that her mind could now revert to circumstances connected with her brother's situation which, previously, they had not ventured to allude to in her presence.

"Poor Frank was quite right when he said how ridiculous it was in any of us to go to that unfortunate ball," she observed. "It was not likely we should enjoy it without Isabel; and I,

in particular, should never have been missed by any one. If I had stayed with her, Frank would not have been so much vexed at her being left, and Mr. Walsingham and he might not have quarrelled at all."

"There were few of us who would not have preferred remaining with her," replied Melicent; "but I am afraid nothing would have prevented, sooner or later, Mr. Walsingham's finding some frivolous grounds for a quarrel with Lord Lymington."

"That is what Kenneth said, when I was reproaching myself for going to Chellingham Castle. I am sure he had more to annoy him that night than any one, and yet, would you believe it, he declares that he did not find the evening at all disagreeable, and should be sorry not to have been there! What could he find pleasant about it, Melicent? Not your conversation; for, begging your pardon, my dear, you were as unentertaining as possible, and looked almost as

much frightened at him as I used to be. What a pity it is that Kenneth should always have so many annoyances when he is in Devonshire! Tresham and I used to make him very uncomfortable; and now there is that disagreeable girl, and poor Frank, whom he never leaves, night or day. No wonder he is dreadfully low;—though one would think he might, at all events, congratulate himself on having escaped being dragged back again to Compton Lodge by those people!"

Mrs. Tresham seemed to expect no reply; and Melicent was glad to be permitted to listen in silence while she proceeded, in a manner more languid than ever.

"What a dreadful temper Alice has!—did you ever see any one so sulky as she was that evening? I am sure Kenneth was perfectly right in never going near her. Lord Chellingham was quite taken in, like Monsieur de Fontanges, by what they call her dignified reserve,

and might have transferred his lordly affections to her, when you would not listen to him; but I am afraid she must have lost ground terribly in his good opinion, when we left her flirting so shockingly with the Vicomte,—to plague Tresham, I suppose."

"The Earl must have been very much distressed at his fête being made the scene of a quarrel," said Melicent, trying to effect a change of subject.

"Poor man! I shall never forget his rueful air in the morning, before we came away. I am afraid you will be very angry with me, but I could not help telling Kenneth all about his offer;—it was the only amusing thing I could recollect just then, and you cannot think how much good it did us both to laugh over it together. Kenneth quite recovered his spirits afterwards, and said he should come over here as soon as possible, when, before, he had been too melancholy to think of leaving Danesfield. Do

try and amuse him, Melicent, as you can so nicely when you choose it; for really, at present, he has so much on his mind that I am quite alarmed about him, and unless you can make him exert himself, I shall be as uneasy on his account as I was this morning on poor Frank's!"

Melicent's admonitions to keep quiet, and not fatigue herself with talking, were at last attended to by her friend, and she was permitted to meditate undisturbed on what she had heard, and on the best means of cheering Colonel Lindesay's spirits.

## CHAPTER XV.

" Comment lui pardonner ?—le barbare est aimé."

ALZIRE.

TRESHAM and Max had remained at Danesfield, and Mrs. Tresham being still too unwell to leave her room, Sir Arthur and his nieces were once more alone the next evening, when their quiet avocations were interrupted by the appearance of Lindesay. The tidings he brought of Lymington's having been pronounced by his medical attendants decidedly out of danger, were received, by Isabel especially, with the

liveliest emotion; and glad of an excuse for escaping from observation, she willingly accepted the commission with which her considerate uncle entrusted her, of conveying the welcome news to Mrs. Tresham.

The relief inspired by having a topic of mutual interest to discuss had, meanwhile, dissipated the momentary embarrassment with which Melicent had heard their visitor announced. No such depression of spirits as Mrs. Tresham had lamented was now visible in Colonel Lindesay, while he replied to Sir Arthur's questions respecting his brother's amendment, and joined in the regret expressed by the good baronet that Wentworth Court could not be their abode during the probably tedious period of his convalescence. It was not until the entrance of Ambrose with the letter-bag, that Melicent felt a portion of her former trepidation returning, as she saw Sir Arthur at once turn to the perusal of the debates, and became conscious that the

task of entertaining their guest was thenceforward to devolve upon herself. She was no longer, however, allowed to bend in silence over her work; nor did her constrained attempts at conversation appear at all to check Colonel Lindesay's animation, as, not a little to her surprise and displeasure, he took his place on the sofa by her side.

"Miss Wentworth cannot require me always to submit without complaint to her studied avoidance," he said, addressing her in carefully lowered accents. "You cannot have been blind to my earnest desire to obtain an audience; and the pain and mortification your coldness has inflicted, must surely have atoned for offences greater than any I have committed. No!—you must not leave me. The worst criminal is not condemned unheard, and I have yet to learn how I have merited such treatment."

Confused and angry, Melicent vainly endeavoured to remove from a position which ex-

posed her to so much embarrassment:—the audacity of Lindesay was not confined to words, and he held one of her hands too closely imprisoned to suffer her to rise.

"Melicent, you must hear me! Since when has love like mine been regarded as a crime? If it be so, then indeed have I deeply sinned, since never did man resign the guidance of his destiny so fully to another, as I have surrendered mine into your hands!"

"An excellent speech that, Colonel Lindesay, of Sir Robert's in to-day's paper, and a most interesting debate altogether upon the Irish Tithe Bill," observed Sir Arthur, whom the intervention of his newspaper, the large library-table, and the lamp by which he was reading, effectually prevented from obtaining a clear insight into what was passing near him.

Lindesay declined, for the present, Sir Arthur's obliging offer of the "Standard," and as soon as he saw his attention again engrossed,

resumed the language which was every moment increasing Melicent's displeasure.

"Remember how long I have borne this suspense. You are no stranger to my passion, and authorised as I now am in my suit, why am I to be treated with this contemptuous anger? Do not turn away from me, Melicent!—if you will not speak to me, I must at least be permitted to read that countenance, in the interpreting of which my sole hope has lately rested, that in time I may be listened to with less coldness—that a love like mine cannot fail in the end to awake a return."

"Upon my word, this is carrying things too far!" exclaimed Sir Arthur. "We now find the fruits of the impolitic system of non-intervention pursued by the present government!—What is your opinion, Colonel Lindesay? These Russians, it seems, have had the audacity to seize the Vixen, and carry her into one of their own ports!"

"—That since they have her, Sir, their wisest plan is to keep fast possession," replied Lindesay. "Such an opportunity might not again occur—and all interference on a similar occasion I hold most highly to be deprecated."

Melicent's fortitude had long been giving way, and she burst suddenly into tears, overcome by an agitation which the passionate tenderness with which Lindesay besought her to be calm tended little to decrease.

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired Sir Arthur, at length roused to a perception of her distress. "She certainly has never entirely got the better of that unfortunate expedition to Yatton, Colonel Lindesay. I shall make a point of her having better advice than Tatnall's. You have been exerting yourself too much about your friend to-day, my dear, and had better lie quietly down there while I go to look for your sister."

In spite of Melicent's earnest attempts to

prevent such a measure, Sir Arthur left the room to consult with Isabel on the state of her sister's nerves. He was scarcely gone when Lindesay, entreating her forgiveness, yet still detaining her, hastily exclaimed,

"Melicent, dearest Melicent, punish me not thus severely for daring to love you! Forgive the boldness which still urges a suit whereon my whole chance of happiness depends. Never before have I thus loved—thus worshipped!—No efforts, no self-reproaches have availed to tear your image from my heart. Loved and loveliest as you are, years would not be sufficient to prove my adoration—but you are too generous to crush by your severity the dreams of happiness, almost too dazzling for reality, which I have dared to cherish. Do not draw back this dear hand—grant it to me, Melicent! —and, if ever man's love were worthy from its intensity of answering affection, you will not

repent the hour which made you my promised bride!"

The voice of Sir Arthur was now heard near the door; and Lindesay, as at last he released her, earnestly whispered,

"If you would not send me hence in despair, Melicent, I entreat you not to leave me. You are free, but do not use your liberty ungenerously."

Trembling and silent, Melicent, though she remained by his side, appeared to her sister fully to justify the alarm expressed on her account by Sir Arthur. By degrees, however, the remedies they prescribed restored her to comparative calmness; and, deeming it the wisest course to leave her to recover her composure in quiet, Sir Arthur turned to Lindesay with an inquiry concerning the movements of Mr. Compton and his family.

"I am emboldened by the kindness you have shown me, Sir Arthur," said Lindesay, after

briefly replying to his question, "to obtrude upon you more of my own affairs than circumstances would seem to authorise. The engagement lately subsisting between Miss Compton and myself has been at once dissolved by her open avowal of indifference. In compliance with her desire to avoid notice while remaining in this neighbourhood, where it had been known to many of her friends, the change has continued a secret during the latter part of her stay in Devonshire; but I now do not feel a longer concealment incumbent upon me, especially towards so kind and valued a friend as Sir Arthur Wentworth."

"I assure you, Colonel Lindesay," replied Sir Arthur, "though you may have older friends, you will find few more sincerely interested in your welfare than myself. I am flattered by your confidence; and, however I may regret being called on to make so harsh an observation respecting my old friend's daughter, I

must acknowledge that on some points, concerning which I was willing to believe myself mistaken, Miss Compton's conduct has appeared to me to merit a degree of blame. We will now, however, waive a subject of too recent and painful a nature, doubtless, to admit of calm discussion. I trust that you will find Lord Lymington going on as we could wish, on your return to Danesfield; and, should you be induced to protract your stay in the South, your visits, allow me to assure you, will nowhere confer greater pleasure than at Wentworth Court."

"There are few persons for whom I entertain a higher regard than Colonel Lindesay," observed the worthy baronet, after his departure. "Really, Melicent, however, his opinions on some subjects are, for a sensible man, very extraordinary. I could easily convince you, my dear, how extremely erroneous were his ideas respecting the system of non-intervention:—but

you are tired, and I must insist on your immediately retiring. If not better in the morning, something very decided must be done with you. Change of air, I almost think, would be recommended—therefore, pray, my dear, exert yourself to shake off this indisposition; for I could as little bear the thought of parting from you at present, as of removing, even for a day, from Wentworth Court."

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Aunque la mona se vesta de seda, mona se queda."
"The monkey, though clad in silk, is still a monkey."
SPANISH PROVERB.

THE calm and decided prohibition given by Sir Arthur, in his niece's name, as well as his own, to the renewal of his suit, was received with angry astonishment by Walsingham, who, however, not doubting the adequacy of his power over her to induce her to rescind such a purpose, immediately claimed a right to hear her determination from the lips of Isabel herself. However she might dread the interview, Isabel

was too firm in her conviction of the right course, to fear being shaken by his arguments; and, while she refused to meet Mr. Walsingham unprotected by the presence of Sir Arthur, she was willing to prove to him, that it was her own resolution, uncontrolled by the prejudices of her relations, which led her to dissolve their engagement. Supported by her uncle, therefore, Isabel heard and endured his reproachful vehemence, and, not without deep emotion, repeated to him her firm resolve never to become the wife of one whose deficiency in stability of principle she considered to have been made manifest. Convinced at length, that he had lost his influence over her who had formerly yielded uncomplainingly to his unreasonable demands, Walsingham, in ungovernable fury, left Wentworth Court, vowing never again to recross its threshold, and almost immediately afterwards departed from the neighbourhood.

Although his conduct had necessarily tended

to withdraw from him that regard, without which affection could not long subsist in a mind like Isabel's, yet painfully had she partaken in the suffering she had inflicted; and the warm approbation evinced towards her by her uncle, her sister's undisguised pleasure, and the satisfaction visibly diffused among all dear to her, by the knowledge of the rupture of her projected union with Walsingham, at first wounded and grieved her, as reflecting too severely upon him whom she had loved, and who, nevertheless, had drawn upon himself such general dislike. Yet, gradually, the influence of this universal contentment extended to herself: she could not be insensible to the happiness of finding herself once more reunited, in heart and prospects, to the beloved circle, among whom she had lately stood almost as an alien. On the effect of time upon her sentiments, however, we must not linger: the course of our narrative, departing, in some degree, from those who have

recently engrossed our attention, leads us to take up the master and mistress of Thornborough Park, upon the occasion of a morning visit, which, in the due routine of similar courtesies, they were, at this precise period, called on to make at Wentworth Court.

An unusually mild and genial morning had induced Mr. Fosbrooke to believe that the fair Euphemia might with impunity venture upon the drive; and carefully enveloped in furs and cachemires, and every precaution having been taken to exclude the least breath of the January air, Mrs. Fosbrooke, in her splendid equipage, and attended by her anxious husband, had, in apparent security, arrived at their destination.

It was natural that Euphemia's maidenly reserve should by this time have improved into matronly gravity and importance; and neither her silence nor her frigidity attracted particular notice among the cheerful inmates of Wentworth Court. When, however, her attentive consort

beheld her, on resuming her place beside him in their luxurious carriage, lean back in evident agitation, not to be diminished by the aid of salts, aromatic vinegar, or other application of the kind, he inquired, in alarm and concern, whether she would not return to Wentworth Court, and await there her recovery from this sudden indisposition.

"Heaven forbid," exclaimed his wife, in almost inarticulate accents—"Heaven forbid that I should ever trust myself within that dwelling again!—Oh, Mr. Fosbrooke, you know not to what I have been exposed!"

"What, in the name of all that is sacred, my angelic Euphemia! has occasioned this excessive emotion? To what danger or annoyance can my soul's idol have been subjected at Wentworth Court?"

"It really is quite out of the question that I should tell you, Mr. Fosbrooke. Unrestrained confidence on this occasion, even situated as we

are, would be alike painful and improper. But one thing I am fully determined on, never to sanction by my presence, proceedings so—so,—I do not think I shall ever be happy again!"

"Calm this alarming agitation, my precious life, and inform your anxious husband, in order that he may know how to soothe your excited feelings, in what extraordinary and preposterous manner the inhabitants of Wentworth Court have been conducting themselves!"

"Even to you, Mr. Fosbrooke, I consider, that besides the sort of thing being what I cannot bring myself to mention, it would also be wrong so completely to expose one of my own sex. *My* opinion of Miss Wentworth, however, has long been fixed, and recent observation, I must say, has scarcely more than justified previous surmises."

Mr. Fosbrooke's curiosity was now excited to the utmost, and his entreaties to be informed of the cause of her uneasiness became so earnest,

that his lady at length, in a hesitating manner, commenced her narration.

"Upon our first being ushered into the drawing-room, Mr. Fosbrooke, you will recollect that we found there only Sir Arthur and Mr. Wentworth, and that the latter went out, as he said, to summon his cousins. Deeming it more correct not to remain alone with Sir Arthur and yourself in the absence of the ladies of the family, I passed, as you may also remember, into the conservatory, and, unconscious of evil, advanced towards a window at the further extremity.—Mr. Fosbrooke, you must excuse me, —this really is a subject wholly unfit for discussion;" and in the greatest confusion, Euphemia averted her face from her inquisitive companion.

"Have you no compassion for my inquietude on your account, my love?—Surely I have a right to demand your confidence, and my advice and affection ought to be of efficacy to dispel this dejection from your spirits."

"I must not disobey you,—otherwise, no motive should induce me to describe the scene that window presented to my eyes. Walking slowly along the terrace beneath, was Miss Wentworth —that Miss Wentworth of whom, as I said, I have never had a good opinion since I saw her taking a tête-à-tête walk with yourself, Mr. Fosbrooke !—and she was leaning on the arm of a very tall, dark, and exceedingly handsome man, in the most shocking way you can imagine, talking and laughing, and looking up in his face sometimes, in that arch way which gentlemen admire, but which once to see in a female sufficiently stamps her in my idea. And then, too, Mr. Fosbrooke, he was looking down upon her, in a manner perfectly indescribable. I cannot even attempt to indicate, in the remotest degree, the expression with which he bent his eyes upon this blameable young person ! It was the kind of thing of which I could not be expected to have formed the slightest conception, and I

was about to turn away in the utmost confusion, when Mr. Wentworth also made his appearance upon the terrace."

"And did he appear to lend his countenance to the affair, my love? Did he manifest no displeasure at these proceedings on the part of his youthful relative?"

"I really think I could have borne anything better than the family depravity evinced by his total disregard of the whole thing. He joined them with the greatest equanimity, and they all talked together for a few minutes, and seemed very much amused. I suppose he told them of our being there, for at length Miss Wentworth turned back to the house with him, and when they were quite gone, the tall stranger walked down the steps and disappeared. Who could he be, Mr. Fosbrooke?—a most elegant, noble-looking man, with a decided air of consequence about him."

"I am of opinion that, as his appearance

seemed to you to denote, he must have been a personage of exalted rank. Mr. Wentworth, you say, evidently countenanced the thing. The Earl of Chellingham, I should apprehend, was the individual in question."

"The Earl?—Oh no, this was a perfectly different-looking person!—a young man, and remarkably handsome. Besides, every one knows that Miss Wentworth refused to listen to Lord Chellingham's addresses. This accounts for her insensibility!"

"Very true, my Euphemia!—but this gentleman—various circumstances induce me to feel persuaded that he is one of the aristocracy of the kingdom. Younger than the Earl?—that might denote Lord Lymington."

"He is at Danesfield, scarcely able to move. I assure you, Mr. Fosbrooke, this was a man not to be named on the same day with either of those you have mentioned, and of much too

striking an exterior for any one who had once seen him ever to forget!"

"I really am quite inadequate to decipher this enigma, but should by no means wish to oblige you, my love, to renew your visits at Wentworth Court until more light be thrown upon this mysterious subject."

"Be not too much overcome!" he added, as he tenderly assisted her to alight at Thornborough Park. "It is your exquisite delicacy, my Euphemia, which renders you unwilling to believe how few of your sex possess your undeviating sense of propriety."

"Do not leave me to suppose, Mr. Fosbrooke, that your impressions on this painful topic are less acute than my own. Let me hope that you do not consider it within the limits of possibility that Mrs. Fosbrooke should set foot within the precincts of Wentworth Court until all danger of scenes of a nature so indelicate be

removed. Whatever other young matrons may deem admissible, your wife, Mr. Fosbrooke, will never permit the strictest decorum to be infringed with impunity in her presence."

With feelings still agitated by the distressing occurrences on the terrace at Wentworth Court, Euphemia retired to her luxurious boudoir; while her husband determined to gratify, as speedily as possible, his curiosity respecting the title of the nobleman whom even Mr. Wentworth regarded with complacency.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"I know a lady that loves talking so incessantly, she won't give an echo fair play; she has that everlasting rotation of tongue that an echo must wait till she dies before it can catch her last words."

WAY OF THE WORLD.

THE comparative seclusion of Wentworth Court, since the unfortunate issue of the fête at Chellingham Castle, was broken, within a day or two of the epoch last described, by another morning visitor, in Mrs. Lambert. The good lady entered with a face of unusual gravity, and,

after taking a seat, remained silent until the servant had left the room.

"I have the most extraordinary piece of news to give you," she at length began, as if to reward herself without further delay for her recent forbearance. "If you were all to guess for a month, you would never be able to make it out. Upon my word, it is quite shocking to think how much we are deceived in people!—Who would have thought that Miss Compton, whom we all took to be such a superior young woman, would have run away, after all, with the Vicomte de Fontanges?"

The surprise elicited by this unexpected intelligence was quite equal to Mrs. Lambert's anticipations, and various questions were immediately addressed to her concerning the particulars of the fact thus positively stated.

"I am sure, my dear," she went on, speaking to Mrs. Tresham, "you are quite right not to flurry yourself about it; and I do hope your

brother, the Colonel, will take the thing as sensibly and quietly as you do; for really, as it has turned out, he may consider that he has had a very fortunate escape. I dare say you were all surprised at not seeing me at Lord Chellingham's ball; but though I could not persuade the Doctor into going, it was a very different thing when the Earl invited us to spend a few quiet days at the Castle this week, and so on Monday we went. But, oh! my dears, I thought it must be meant as a judgment upon me, for having plagued my poor husband into leaving home, when I found how stupid it was! There was the Earl, who always puzzles me to death, more prosy and unintelligible than ever, and seeming quite out of spirits; which, from all accounts, is not to be wondered at. However, it did seem hard upon the poor man to have Mr. Compton added to his troubles just at this time; and how he could stand it, and be so polite all the while, I cannot imagine; but the more

bearish old Compton became, the more pompous and grand was his Lordship. It really was fortunate that Mrs. Compton was able to exert herself, and listen so well to his long speeches, for I never could do it in my life; and what with her husband's rudeness, and the Doctor's always going to sleep over them, I was quite afraid the Earl would be affronted at last.

"As for Alice, she never took any notice of any one, nor spoke to a creature after we came: so, I suppose, she and her Frenchman had settled it all beforehand. How she managed it no one could tell, but Wednesday morning she was gone, and everything belonging to her; not a scrap left, excepting a note, as sulky and ungracious as herself, for her mother, saying that she had gone off with Monsieur de Fontanges. It was absolutely shocking to see the rage her father was in, though he declared he had always expected something of the kind; which shows that he did not think so much of her as some

people did. I was almost glad to see him spend some of his ill-humour upon the Earl, for fear he should have killed his poor wife, and that child Dora, who, it was plain, had lent a hand towards helping her sister off: that young lady will be pretty sharply looked after in future, I will answer for it. It was the greatest relief, as you may suppose, when at last they all set off for Compton Lodge; for certainly old Compton's remarks about fortune-hunters, and unhandsome cuts at Lord Chellingham for inviting them to his house, made every one very uncomfortable. When they were gone, the Earl came and sat down by me:—but I cannot attempt to tell you what he said, only it was quite plain that he was terribly cast down by this disgraceful business having taken place at Chellingham Castle. The Doctor and I stayed a day longer to comfort him; but what with those young men quarrelling at his ball, and the duel, and now Miss Compton's

elopement, I shall be surprised if he gets over it all in a hurry."

The entrance of Lindesay, at this moment, greatly disconcerted Mrs. Lambert; who, out of consideration for his feelings, instantly stopped short, whispering to Melicent that they had better leave it to his sister to inform him, as cautiously as possible, of what had happened. "I really am wanted so particularly at home this morning, that I am sure, my dear Miss Wentworth, you will excuse my staying any longer. Did you happen to read the papers to-day at Danesfield, Colonel Lindesay?—no particular news in them, I suppose? Oh! I thought you looked a little grave—that was all. I am sure, I am quite bewildered this morning, for I have left my bag. Pray don't trouble yourself, Colonel Lindesay; I am afraid you will soon understand what has put me out so sadly."

Lindesay's perplexity concerning the object

of the worthy lady's dark insinuations was quickly removed by the intelligence, which his friends conjectured might be communicated without any of the preparation she had recommended, and which was received by him with an equanimity that would probably have surprised and shocked her. Indeed, Alice had so long ceased to be considered a superior young person by the inmates of Wentworth Court, that they soon began to regard the step she had taken as perfectly in accordance with her late conduct, and even as more excusable, since her situation, on returning with her amiable family to Compton Lodge, would certainly not have been an enviable one.

"I am sure I do not wish to be uncharitable," said Mrs. Tresham, who, partly recovered from her late illness, was reclining on the sofa, waiting for the carriage to convey her to Danesfield; "but I cannot help being very glad that disagreeable young woman is off our minds at

last. What a trouble and distress she might have been to us all! When I think of poor Frank, it quite makes me shudder at my folly in persuading Tresham to make love to her. If you and he had quarrelled seriously about her, Kenneth, I never should have forgiven myself."

"There was little cause for apprehension, Laura," said her husband. "Lindesay was sufficiently alive to the error into which he had fallen, to render my task of opening his eyes an easy one. But though sanctioned by Laura, and actuated by the praiseworthy motive of serving a kinsman in the part I played, I confess having repented it sufficiently to feel extremely thankful for this proof that Miss Compton has not suffered very deeply from our machinations."

"I assure you that I am fully aware of the obligation you conferred upon me," said his brother-in-law. "My first emotion on the sub-

ject was not jealousy, Laura, but a pleasurable surprise that Miss Compton could take interest in anything. Perhaps I might contemplate learning Tresham's secret of making himself agreeable, since I must own to having proved wholly incompetent that way myself. For Heaven's sake, my dear fellow, do tell us what you could find to say to her."

"Dora was quite right, I have no doubt, when she assured us it was great nonsense," remarked Mrs. Tresham. "As he told me she was so silly, I wanted to get Frank to help him, thinking she might like the idea of being her ladyship;—but he said he would rather do it all himself;—and he certainly was very kind in taking a great deal of trouble, and did make her very ridiculous. When he told me, however, about your quarrelling at Yatton, I was very much frightened at what I had done; and now, I cannot imagine how I came to be so foolish, and am quite determined never to let

him do anything of the sort again. How surprised poor Frank will be when he hears of Miss Compton's elopement! Come, Melicent, the carriage is at the door, and Kenneth is waiting to accompany us to Danesfield."

Though never openly canvassed in the presence of Sir Arthur's family, Mr. Walsingham's departure from England on a diplomatic mission to a foreign court afforded, not long afterwards, an almost equal occasion for wonder and conjecture to the neighbourhood of Comerford. A month of gradual amendment had removed all apprehensions on Lord Lymington's account, when, leaving him still in the hands of his friendly entertainers, Tresham and his wife returned to St. Austin's. Their absence from Wentworth Court, however, was not to be of long duration, since in the spring it was already understood that they were to be sum-

moned to witness the marriage of Melicent and Lindesay. To this no obstacle intervened —every day had served to attach them more firmly to each other ;—and none of the parties concerned thought of unnecessarily delaying an event fraught with so much happiness to all, as the union of those who, with characters and dispositions in such evident accordance, had at length discovered in each other a fitting resting-place for their mutually deep and unchangeable affections.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

" Chascun l'aima; sous son empire
Chascun ressentît ses bienfaits :
Beaultè previent, doulceur attire,
Bonté gagne et fixe à jamais."

Once more our narrative, less scrupulous than the fair Euphemia, reverts to the terrace-walk, with which her description has made us familiar, at Wentworth Court. The season, indeed, had undergone a change since the period of her distressing visit;—the air was balmy with the flowery fragrance of June, and the woods and gardens wore their gayest summer aspect;

—but the same pair were slowly pacing the terrace, and, in their manner, betraying as plainly the charm each found in the other's society, as on the former occasion. That indescribable look with which, to the horror of the sensitive Euphemia, Lindesay had then gazed upon his betrothed, had even assumed an expression of yet deeper tenderness, as he looked down with pride upon the beautiful wife who now leaned upon his arm with an air of confiding happiness which proved the husband to have as yet kept the promise of the lover, that she should not repent the hour that made her his.

Lindesay was listening with evident gratification to the request which his companion seemed urging with affectionate earnestness. He shook his head, however, as he replied—"No, Melicent!—this can not yet be—Strathmorven must want its mistress a little longer. Its master feels too sensibly the sacrifice he must one day

require to be made for him, to advance that period by an hour unnecessarily. The promise I made Sir Arthur not to take you too soon from him, remains still in its force;—without it, I might not yet, perhaps, have called you mine."

"There is no sacrifice, Kenneth, believe me, in the case now, whatever it might have been at the time when you yielded to my uncle's request. I could not then, perhaps, have resolved to quit at once those so dear, without more of sorrow than your wife should feel, when seeking in your company the home for which, now, I long with earnestness equal to your own. Your presence I know to be required there. For my sake, you linger away from your mountains and glens, on which summer must now be shedding a thousand beauties. Take me thither with you, Kenneth, and do not fear that, by your side, I can suffer from the melancholy

to which my disposition is seldom prone,—nor compel me to avow how ungratefully you have repaid our kind friend's affection, by teaching me to care little for aught else, when in competition with yourself!"

"And Isabel, Melicent?"—said Lindesay, as he drew her towards him:—"you cannot look at me steadily when I speak of her,—what would your parting be?—No! believe me, dearest, there is no occasion for alteration in our places. My hills and glens can do well without me, and will look all the brighter to their lady's eye later in the year. Meanwhile, everything here is tending favourably to our wishes; and we may expect to be quickly released from all fears of being too much missed. Were I to take her darling sister away at present, Isabel's hatred of man and his cruelty would assuredly prejudice her against the suit to which she seems so well disposed to listen."

"You think, then," said Melicent, with a smile, "that we shall, after all, visit Strathmorven unaccompanied."

"I do, indeed, fear that you will have no better society than mine," replied her husband. "Our pretty Isabel's restored cheerfulness has lately partaken of that same thoughtfulness, varied by occasional fits of embarrassment and confusion, which I once considered so captivating in her sister, though untinctured by the slight irritability which caused me so much pain, until relieved by the amiable Dora's gratifying explanation. Wentworth, however, seems very well satisfied without Dora's intervention; and perhaps it is better that it should not be needed, as our gentle sister might not approve of the violent measures I found necessary to achieve final success."

"You were certainly provoking enough to excuse any excess of ire into which I might have

been led," returned Melicent, laughing. "But, in the present case, Isabel is as little likely to manifest any of my ill-temper, as Max is to conduct himself with the arrogance which so justly excited my indignation in that presuming Colonel Lindesay. I trust, indeed, that you will prove right: Isabel cannot long be obdurate; Max's attachment has been so long tried, so respectfully silent, and is now so evident in word and look. It is the one thing alone wanting to my happiness, to know hers in his keeping, and to see my uncle's fondest wishes realised by their union. But here comes Lord Lymington. —I thought you were going out with my cousin?"

"We intended it," replied Lymington, "but Wentworth seems to have found a pleasant companion within doors. After waiting till my patience was exhausted, I went in search of him, and found him quietly engaged in conversation

with your sister. What passed while I was in the room was certainly of a most uninteresting nature; but they seemed ungrateful for my attempts at enlivening it, and looked as if they could see me depart without regret."

"I cannot see what business you had there at all," remarked Lindesay. "The gentle Edith might have taught you more consideration for others, even after the sharper lesson you received had failed in its effect. You ought to have mounted your horse, and gone to Danesfield, as soon as you found Wentworth did not return to you."

"I am going thither now," replied Lymington, "and trust I shall find myself more welcome there. But you must not accuse me of spoiling sport in the present instance. I only stayed long enough to ascertain that all was going on as I could wish, and to be quite convinced that I never performed a more merito-

rious action than that of getting shot by Mr. Walsingham."

"I am afraid you will not have any greater chance than formerly, of inducing Wentworth to accompany you this summer," said Lindesay. "Your own intention of undertaking that expedition remains, of course, in full vigour?"

"No!" answered Lymington; "I have given up that idea. You all look so comfortable at Wentworth Court, that I have some thoughts of renouncing all wild schemes and vagaries, and settling down quietly at home in imitation of my friends. First, however," he added, smiling, "I must go to Danesfield."

Had the heart of Isabel been entirely revealed to her friends, they would have been satisfied how little reason there was to apprehend a long resistance on her part to their wishes. Almost unconsciously, she had learned to appreciate as

it deserved the love with which she felt herself to be regarded by him to whom she was already bound by friendship and gratitude, and on whose excellent qualities a lengthened intimacy had taught her what firm reliance might be placed. In Maximilian's trusting devotion, it was impossible for her not to perceive how far more desirable a prospect awaited her, than in the thraldom wherein her affections had been held by her former despotic lover. Before she would have admitted, even to herself, the revolution her mind had undergone, the dreams of romance which she had imagined for ever dissipated, seemed returning to her fancy; but, again it was her cousin who formed their object, and whose noble and generous character, and ardent love, had again acquired for him that power, which, while unknown, he had possessed over her imagination.

She could not continue blind to the motive

which detained Lindesay and her sister from the home whither she knew their wishes to be inclining. Her uncle, it was true, had refrained from openly urging Maximilian's suit; but his eyes were frequently fixed upon her with an expression sufficiently indicative of his anxious desire; and could she deny the change which had taken place in her feelings, when so many interests were dependant on her decision?

At first vague and undecided, her reflections gradually lent to Isabel's countenance the tinge of thoughtfulness deemed by Lindesay so favourable to her lover's wishes. The patience of Lindesay and his wife was put to no long trial. Before the summer had reached its full beauty, Max had won Isabel's consent to become his bride; and Sir Arthur, with deep and joyful emotion, had bestowed his benediction upon his children. Though no jealous lover demanded

from her the reluctant avowal, Isabel would have vainly sought to conceal her projected union as effectually as her first engagement. The news of Maximilian's happiness was too welcome to be suffered long to remain a secret. She read its effect in the increased satisfaction of all the inmates of Wentworth Court, in the grateful love testified towards her by friends and dependants, and above all, in the open exultation and renewed cheerfulness of her uncle, who now beheld the apprehensions removed with which, a few months since, he had looked forward, with mournful but resigned feelings, to parting with both his favourites,—to seeing his heir sink into yet deeper melancholy than that of which he had long since divined the true cause, and to linger himself in his deserted halls, conscious of the ruined prospects of the two beings most dear to him, and of the overthrow of the hopes he had once fondly cherished. Now, indeed, a joyful

change had been wrought for the kind and benevolent old man;—he saw his youthful relatives happy around him; received their assurances, that to him, principally, was owing their present felicity; and had only a temporary parting to fear from Melicent, whom so many ties would in future connect with the home of her sister.

With no misgivings to occasion a demand for delay, no apprehensions as to her future destiny to darken the minds of her friends, a brief space only was permitted to intervene before Maximilian led his bride to the altar; and never did the sun rise upon a happier morning than that on which, with tears of joy, Sir Arthur gave the hand of Isabel to his nephew. Again, the halls of Wentworth Court were thronged with guests, and, as he saw Isabel blushingly receive the honours which had, in earlier days, been showered upon his own graceful and highborn consort, and fervently blessed the dutiful love wherewith her

glances turned to him for approbation, he felt that his happiness was full even to overflowing, and that, even after he should sleep with his ancestors, his station would be worthily occupied, and the name and honours of his house fittingly upheld by the heir of the Wentworths, and his loved and beautiful wife.

Again, within a brief period, were the bridal party assembled, to bid farewell to Lindesay and Melicent, who were now at length free to seek their distant abode. The prospect of a general reunion at Christmas went far to dissipate the melancholy which would, under other circumstances, have attended such a separation; and Mrs. Tresham, detaining Melicent yet another moment, said, as she embraced her,—

"We, dear Melicent, shall see you sooner, than these scarcely, I trust, dearer friends. Could you believe me too indolent to comply with

your wishes, and accompany Tresham in the autumn to Strathmorven? To see you I would undertake even a more distant journey; and I certainly do not intend to trust my husband so far off, and in such dangerous society, without my guardian care."

"From our subsequent Christmas rendezvous at Wentworth Court," said Tresham, "we seem at present only to have dismissed those members by whom the cordiality of our circle appeared formerly to be diminished. Let us hope, that in the mean time we may not grow so much tired of being all perfectly happy, as actually to wish for Mr. Compton, Madame la Vicomtesse, and Dora, to vary the uniform course of our matrimonial harmony!"

The last words of farewell were at length spoken; and Lindesay, who had waited with long-concealed impatience for the hour that was to render Melicent still more entirely his own, led her to the carriage which was to bear them

to his own splendid residence; there, in his idolizing love, and in the tranquillity of their future domestic life, to find ample compensation for all she had left for the sake of sharing with him his Highland home.

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